

# PROCEEDING

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHINESE DIASPORA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES

(Socio Cultural Research of the Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia)

November, 25<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> 2022



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Universitas Kristen Maranatha  
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# Wayang Potehi: Keberagaman Wayang di Indonesia

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*Abstract: This article aims to examine the existence of wayang potehi originating from Chinese culture which later developed in Indonesia. The method used is descriptive qualitative. This article explains that the Chinese community uses potehi puppets as a tool or means to convey their existence. Wayang Potehi has symbols that function to convey messages to the public. Wayang is a traditional art performance that has been forgotten by the times, wayang potehi has a religious ritual function. Until now, the existence of Wayang Potehi is still maintained through various performances.*

*Keywords: Chinese Culture, Indonesian Culture, Wayang Potehi*

## PRELIMINARY

Wayang potehi is a type of acculturation of Chinese and Javanese culture (Kuardhani, 2018). Wayang Potehi is also a type of puppet originating from southern China. Wayang potehi, according to the activities of Rumah Cinta Wayang Dwi Woro Retno, is one of Indonesia's traditional cultural heritages which is almost extinct. This art was brought by ethnic Chinese immigrants to various parts of Indonesia (Lombard, 1996). Wayang potehi is a puppet that is shaped like a doll made of cloth and some parts of it are made of wood. The way to play it is by the maid putting her hand into the cloth bag. According to legend, the potehi puppet was found by five prisoners in a prison who were sentenced to death. The fourth person is sad, but the fifth person has an interesting idea. He said that instead of mourning death, it is better to be comforted. In the end, the five people took utensils that were in the prison, such as pots and plates. They started banging to get sound as an accompaniment to their game. The beautiful melodies that were produced were finally heard by the emperor, who finally granted them forgiveness. However, as time progresses, culture is less attractive to modern society, due to the lack of socialization, the potehi puppet is not well known by the public. Finally, "Wayang Potehi" events are often held which are expected to become educational tours to reintroduce potehi puppets. Wayang Potehi is one of the puppet shows which is still interesting to be watched by the general public and must be maintained. Not only interesting, but Wayang Potehi is also often shown for sacred rituals.

As time went by, wayang potehi began to be known by many people. During the wayang potehi show, two languages are used, namely Hokkien and Indonesian. The use of the Indonesian language is carried out as a form of socialization of the Chinese ethnicity towards Indonesian society. Indonesian is also used as a means of communication so that wayang potehi performances can also be accepted by Indonesian people. Wayang potehi is seen as a traditional performance by maintaining its standard. A wayang potehi performance as a public spectacle essentially has a purpose. The puppeteer involved in the performance plays a role in achieving this goal. Not infrequently the wayang potehi show is held for a sacred event, so the role of the puppeteer becomes risky (high risk).

Usually, wayang potehi shows regularly in a pagoda every day, wayang potehi shows are held every day at certain hours. Usually, life around the pagoda is dominated by ethnic Chinese, so other ethnic groups living there interact with ethnic Chinese directly or indirectly. Potehi puppets can be watched by all people, from small children to the elderly. The form of direct interaction is usually through daily conversations. This form of interaction indirectly begins with the existence of an inter-ethnic culture that is presented and used to exist between the lives of the two ethnicities. The puppeteer always holds wayang potehi events as a show for the public so that they know extensively about wayang potehi. The puppeteer always tries to make the performances he holds not just for viewing but to give deeper knowledge about potehi puppets.

Much research on wayang in Indonesia usually leads to traditional puppets such as shadow puppets, Purwa puppets, and so on. Researchers are interested in describing how the existence of wayang potehi shows in Indonesia.

Stenberg said that communication and culture cannot be separated. Edward T. Hall added that communication is culture and culture is communication. The function of communication is to pass on inheritance to the next generation so that communication has a function to maintain existence (Stenberg, 2015). According to Kurniawan existence is existence, form (which appears), the existence of something that distinguishes one object from another (Kurniawan, 2017). Mangunsong also says that existence is not rigid and stagnant, but flexible and experiences development or vice versa, depending on the ability of individuals to actualize their potential (Mangunsong & Djatiprambudi, 2021). That is, the existence of something that is recognized if there is communication to maintain its existence or communication that shows that something still exists. This description also explains that the puppeteer of wayang potehi as a communicator has an important role in maintaining the existence of this potehi puppet.



## METHOD

Methods In this study, researchers used qualitative research methods with descriptive analysis techniques to answer research problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Wijaya et al., 2021). According to Bogdan and Taylor in a book entitled "State and Corruption", Qualitative Research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data, speech or writing, and behavior that can be observed from the subject itself (Taylor et al., 2016).

## DISCUSSION

Changes that occurred in China in the 13th century made some ethnic Chinese go to Indonesia (Pitoyo & Triwahyudi, 2018; Suryadinata, 2020). The arrival of the Chinese brought new things in the field of trade. One of those sent to Indonesia was Admiral Cheng Ho who made a voyage and wrote about his journey (Rizky, 2019). In this note there is a record of ethnic Chinese who are Muslims along the banks of the Brantas river. Relations between ethnic Chinese and Indonesians at that time were going well. These immigrants came from the province of Hokkien, which means that these immigrants brought the potehi puppet art performance to Indonesia (Halim, 2021; Kuardhani, 2018).

During the Dutch colonial period, there was the Apartheid system implemented by the Dutch Government which led to discrimination against ethnic Chinese and Indonesian people (Pitoyo & Triwahyudi, 2018). The Dutch colonial government placed the Chinese ethnicity above Indonesian society. This changed the mindset of the Indonesian people towards ethnic Chinese. So, that it gave rise to a negative stigma against the Chinese ethnicity and began to emerge as a result of the different rights granted by the Dutch Government. And this stigma lasts long enough. After the colonial period ended, after Indonesia's independence, the life of the Chinese ethnic group was limited. And during the New Order era under the leadership of President Soeharto issued a regulation regarding the absence of celebrations up to the attributes worn that were related to the Chinese ethnicity. This regulation prevented ethnic Chinese from moving freely. During the New Order era, the ban on everything related to ethnic Chinese made them protect themselves and their culture (Suparno, 2017; Suparno & Hadirman, 2022). And so that currently, the Potehi puppet show which is in the temples is very sacred because it is intended for the gods.

Wiratri (2017) explains that there is one thing that is maintained by ethnic Chinese regarding their culture and their ancestral country (Aryani et al., 2021; Wiratri, 2017). The majority of these Chinese people take good care of their original culture so that in every corner of the world where there are Chinese people, there will certainly be China Town. Sugiri Sutedja (2013) in the sociotechnology journal adds that the concentration of ethnic communities in China Town creates a sense of togetherness among Chinese ethnics and becomes more solid solidarity and awareness of an exclusive group (Kustedja et al., 2013). The condition of concentration of the Chinese ethnic group in urban space is limited, making it only possible for activities in the trade sector.

The first time it appeared in Indonesia, wayang potehi was played using the Hokkien language. Potehi dolls are made of wood and are carved based on different wayang characters. The puppets, which are in the form of dolls with a height of about 30cm, only perform in certain pagodas. After the new order, the regulation was revoked by the Government of Indonesia on the grounds of nationalism and multicultural life (Mekarsari & Jatmiko, 2020; Pradhana et al., 2020). The Chinese ethnic group, which was limited because of this regulation, began to develop itself by entering other fields, such as politics and social affairs. The end of the New Order era became an opportunity for ethnic Chinese to reduce the negative stigma in society. The socialization process within the community became easier so ethnic Chinese culture began to be accepted and developed.

According to (Stenberg, 2015) in his research potehi comes from 3 syllables of Mandarin, namely poo, tay, and hie. Poo means cloth, tay means bag, hie means wayang.

The first time was the potehi puppet show which was shown at the Hong Tiek Hian Temple by the encik. Encik is the name for the puppeteer of wayang potehi who was originally Chinese and could not speak Indonesian at that time (Nuratri, 2022; Yoswara et al., 2015). The ladies speak the Hokkien language, which comes from the Fujian area on the Chinese plains.

The potehi puppet show at the pagoda is never absent. The Hong Tiek Hian Temple, which is located in the Dukuh Customs area of Kupang, is still staging potehi puppet shows. The Chinese who worship or live around the pagoda can be seen from the response of the ethnic Chinese to requests for a potehi puppet show. This can be seen from the hours of performances that are held every day which are still heard even though they are not seen directly. Then at the Hong Tiek Hian Temple, it is considered a learning center for wayang potehi puppeteers before becoming a puppeteer with tight hours of performances.

The presence of wayang potehi in Indonesia adds to the richness of Indonesian culture. The cultural acculturation that occurs in wayang potehi adds to the list of versions of wayang potehi performances (Kuardhani, 2018). There are currently two versions of the potehi puppet show, namely the classic and the contemporary version. The similarities between the two shows are the use of the potehi puppets and the same stage for the performances. The difference between wayang potehi and other puppets can be seen in the shape of the puppets.

The clothes used by wayang potehi are different from other puppets in general. Potehi puppet clothing is typical of China with embroidered symbols with plant and animal patterns. The facial expressions in potehi puppets from the

shape of the eyes tend to be slanted and the skin of the potehi puppets has a different color according to the character. In addition, the music used also uses music that comes from China.

In the classic version, the duration of the potehi puppet show is two hours or even more. The story told by the dalang for the classic version is the legend of the Chinese kingdom. Chinese royal legends are told in serial form or series from episode to episode to day to day. The hours of playing the classical version of wayang potehi differ depending on the pagoda as the venue for the performance. In one day, wayang potehi shows can be performed two to three times with a fairly long duration of two hours. The story is serialized so that it takes two weeks to a month. The classic version of Wayang Potehi is held when there are Chinese celebrations or because of requests from foundations. The classical version of the potehi wayang performance is held in pagodas. The function of this performance is as a ritual function to honor the spirits of the ancestors or as a form of gratitude or a request by the Chinese people. The function of the ritual is considered sacred so the potehi puppet show at the pagoda will continue even if there are no spectators.

In the contemporary version, the duration of the wayang potehi performance is between one and two hours shorter. The puppeteer wayang potehi who performs the contemporary version will improvise to tell the legend of the Chinese kingdom briefly but without reducing the important points in the story. Locations used for performances are entertainment venues such as malls or art buildings. The purpose of this contemporary version of wayang potehi is as an entertainment function as well as to introduce the public to wayang potehi.

In the contemporary version, the puppeteer wayang potehi will insert Javanese hums or insert regional words according to the area where they are being performed to attract the attention of the audience. The musical instrument that accompanies the contemporary potehi puppet show still uses traditional Chinese musical instruments in collaboration with modern musical instruments such as the guitar.

The difference between these two versions will be played according to the request of the foundation that oversees the potehi puppet. Sometimes there is also a temple with a request to give a contemporary version of wayang potehi. The puppeteer of the potehi puppet is obliged to perform a ritual for the potehi puppet stage which is being used for the first time for staging. The ritual is in the form of a supply of fresh chicken blood which will be smeared on each pillar of the potehi puppet big stage. The blood of the chicken is obtained by way of the puppeteer biting a chicken that has a black or white color. The site is only to take fresh blood from the chicken without having the chicken die. After the big stage is used, it will be dismantled and stored. This ritual is useful to ward off evil spirits. When rearranged, the ritual is no longer performed. The potehi puppet show at the mall has a simpler ritual, only preparing fruits as offerings and ci-swak paper. According to the puppeteer of wayang potehi, playing the wayang tends to lead to supernatural objects so wayang potehi also needs to be ritualized as well. So this ritual will apply at the opening and closing of the show.

The big stage for the potehi puppet has name Bu Tai, the small stage is named Tay Lau, and the smaller stage for the puppets is called Pay Lau. The puppeteers of wayang potehi who adhere to the Islamic religion carry out their obligations as Muslims. However, if in one team there are all Muslims, the puppeteer will perform the ritual according to his role.

Potehi wayang performances in the contemporary era not only include elements of songs that are popular with the public, but also the language of the performing area. Now a few puppeteers of wayang potehi learn the local language of the performance to complement the performance. The puppeteer wayang potehi thinks that this makes it easier for the puppeteer to interact with the audience so that messages can be conveyed more easily.

Chinese culture becomes a new culture that coexists with Javanese ethnicity in the Chinatown area. The puppeteer of wayang potehi of Javanese ethnicity is accustomed to Indonesian and Javanese adapts to another new language, namely Hokkien and Mandarin. The language used when performing the potehi puppet is Hokkien with a subtle level like krama inggil in Javanese. Sukar Mudjiono the puppeteer of wayang potehi thinks that culture or art is a universal thing. If foreigners can learn Indonesian culture, Indonesians should also be able to learn the foreign culture.

The art of wayang potehi has entered the district in Jombang which is estimated to have been since 1920 which was centered on the Hong San Kiong Gudo Temple. In 1920 there was a grandfather from Cwancu who happened to be a puppeteer who came to Indonesia. According to research, wayang potehi has existed in Indonesia since 1600 (Salmon, 2014). Wayang potehi used to be called wayang titi. This puppet potehi activist said that since he was a child his life has been united with several temples, one of which is the Hong San Kiong temple, which eventually made him fall in love with potehi puppets, and he also wants to help the players or puppeteers of the potehi puppets.

In 1967 the potehi puppet became extinct due to Presidential Instruction number 14 which conflicted with Chinese religious beliefs and customs. The potehi puppet in Gudo is still active because the community supports the show, one might even say because of good relations between the communities (Mangunsong & Djatiprambudi, 2021). There is also a reason why the potehi puppets became extinct due to technological advances in that society. It once happened that when the potehi puppet was shown in the pagoda, no one paid attention at all, because at that time the people thought it was a monotonous show, in the end, the people did not pay attention.

As for the beginning of the creation of wayang potehi from 5 people who were on death row, initially one of the 5 people was very bored because they were waiting for their death. In the end one of the people created a doll made of makeshift cloth, then they thought that the game would be memorable and finally they created beautiful music or tones from makeshift tools such as pots, etc. Then a prison guard heard the beautiful music and the guard appreciated being so



entertained by the performance. In the end, the 5 prisoners were released by law. And the show is now called Wayang Potehi.

Wayang Potehi has finally entered into an international go which has been invited by several countries, namely Japan, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Now wayang potehi is played by 5 players, 2 players who act as puppeteers and 3 players who act as musical accompaniment. The government pays little attention to wayang potehi because the government thinks that wayang potehi is from China. The puppeteers hope that the potehi puppet can be preserved and recognized by the government so that it can be played again.

In the past, this potehi puppet was only held for the gods and goddesses in terms of commemorating the day of their birth. In the end, this potehi puppet art has started to be played in malls. Wayang Potehi is also now often played during Chinese New Year celebrations. The puppeteers in wayang potehi are struggling so that this potehi puppet does not become extinct.

Because it is already around 3,000 years old, wayang potehi continues to experience changes, especially when it enters Indonesia and now wayang potehi is a special spectacle for art lovers. When entering the country of Indonesia, the puppeteers change the Hokkien language to Indonesian with the aim that the Indonesian people know what the puppeteer is telling.

From September 1<sup>st</sup> up to 11<sup>th</sup> 2022, the Potehi puppet team from Jombang will perform at the TongTong Fair (TTF) in The Hague, Netherlands. There are 9 people from the Potehi Gudo puppet team from Jombang who will perform. They said that they would bring the names of Jombang and Seni Potehi to the arena. It was the first time that the puppet Potehi Gudo, Jombang was able to attend the TTF performance, because previously they had failed to go due to funding problems. To be able to leave this time they are raising funds from the public. They do fundraise because they know that there is a lack of support from the central government. In the end, many people supported them, starting from Islam, Christian, Buddhism, Confucianism, Javanese, Chinese, Madurese, etc. they donate from 50K to millions.

After the reform era of President Gus Dur's government, of course, the removal of the ban on performing for Wayang Potehi seemed to bring fresh air to arts from southern China. However, with the start of Wayang Potehi's life in the Gus Dur era, the actors have begun to age and are not supported by good regeneration. Ocdy Susanto explained about the old Potehi Wayang, this art from China is around 15 centuries old.

Currently, wayang potehi has very good social and ritual functions. Not only performed for ethnic Chinese, but also the general public or non-Chinese. Several plays are often played which are taken from classical Chinese stories, such as the novels by Sam Pek Eng Tay and Se Yu with the magical monkey character Sun Go Kong. The characters played during the show have been adapted from figures in the local ketoprak art. For example, the character Si Jin Kui was adopted to become the character Joko Sudiro, then there is the character Prabu Lisan Puro who was taken from the character Li Si Bin who was the second emperor of the Tong Dynasty (618-907M) (Kurniawan, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Wayang Potehi is ethnic Chinese culture which is performed by the puppeteers of the potehi puppets puppets traditionally shows for religious purposes. The mastermind in wayang potehi has a very important role in continuing to introduce this show to the public. The puppeteers have also succeeded in making the potehi puppet known to many people even abroad. The research found due to environmental factors made the puppeteer choose to be the puppeteer of wayang potehi. Currently many potehi puppet shows have been carried out that aim to continue preserving wayang potehi as part of Chinese culture. Pagodas and even malls have started active to schedule potehi puppet shows with two hours' time slot. The wayang potehi show is now broadcast in Indonesian so that the audience can enjoy and understand what the puppeteer is telling. The puppeteer in wayang potehi has trained through several stages, such as having to get used to holding puppets and playing typical Chinese musical instruments. The role of the dalang in wayang potehi is very important because they have to convey the story well to the audience. Nowadays it is very difficult to find replacements for these puppeteers because lack of interest in becoming a puppeteer.

There is also research that that shows the wayang potehi currently developing quite well. Wayang Potehi has developed into two versions, namely the classic version and the modern version. The main purpose of the classic potehi puppet performance religious show for the sake of gratitude which is considered to shared happiness with other people. Meanwhile, modern potehi puppet shows are a development of classic potehi puppets. A flexible culture has kept up with the times. The modern potehi puppet show as a medium of entertainment for the wider community. Now potehi puppets are presented in society as a form of existence for the puppeteers. Wayang potehi show in the modernization era at the Hong Tiek Hian Temple in Surabaya is still very well maintained. The existence of wayang potehi is supported because there are many enthusiasts believer of wayang potehi as religious rituals.

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