

## **The New Order Play: *Wayang* as a Medium for Development Messages, 1969–84**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the relationship between the state and the performing arts in the transmission of political messages. During the New Order period in Indonesia, the traditional shadow puppet theater genre known as *wayang* played a significant role as a medium of communication between the government and society. We specifically claim that *wayang*, especially *wayang kulit*, were used by the government to carry messages of social and economic development during this period. These messages were incorporated into plays or scenes when it was possible without diminishing the standard of *wayang* performance. In contrast to previous studies that have discussed the role of *wayang* from a philosophical and semiotic perspective, this study will focus on the history of *wayang kulit* as a means of spreading messages of development in Java during the New Order era. This study finds that the relations between the society, the *dalang*, and the government generate the *wayang* art as a medium of propaganda, especially the economic development agenda in the New Order period. The data in this article were obtained through literature studies and from several documents of the period between 1969 and 1984.

*Keywords:* Art during the New Order era, cultural history, Javanese, wayang art

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The New Order led by President Soeharto was known as the era of development. It was marked by government policies that were drastically different from those of the Old Order era, specifically because of their focus on economic development. The New Order government tried to purely and consistently reorganize and improve the life of the nation

based on the goal of implementing Pancasila (the official philosophical foundation of Indonesian state, comprises five principles) and the 1945 Constitution. According to Soeharto, the establishment of the New Order had no other purpose except to rebuild people's lives and the structure of the state and the nation. The policies were aimed at economic development, and emphasized, for example, the development of the agricultural sector during a series of five-year plans. They aimed to increase agricultural production to meet the demand for food, expand employment, and improve the income and living conditions of farmers (Anonym. 1978). Development in the social sector, including the *Keluarga Berencana* (Family Planning) program, was also intended by the New Order government for effective economic development.

To successfully carry out these development programs, it was essential for the government to convey information to village communities. Thus, the government needed a familiar medium that could be used as a channel for distribution. For this reason, traditional arts such as *ludruk*, *ketoprak*, and *wayang* were used as tools to spread the government's messages. Based on Hadi and Kasuma's (2012) research, *wayang* art was used more often than the other two traditional arts as a medium for delivering messages from the New Order government. *Wayang* puppet shows use traditional Javanese aesthetic concepts, which are symbolic, contemplative, and philosophical. Besides being the most popular art form on Java, *wayang* was chosen because it attracted the

most attention from village communities, especially farmers, the majority of whom were still very traditional in their way of life and thinking. *Wayang* performances, which usually last for approximately eight hours, are considered as quite an effective means of communication because they include many aspects such as sound effects, drama, music, dance, which engage many senses.

The theater where a *wayang* show is held is typically filled with not only spectators but also with vendors so that it looks like a night market. When the *dalang* (puppeteer) starts telling stories or performing plays, reciprocity occurs between the *dalang* and the community, as the community also learns from the *dalang* in addition to being entertained. This aspect of *wayang* was evident when Ki Nartosabdo performed the play *Pandawa Main Dadu* at the State Palace on Saturday, April 12, 1969, especially during the *goro-goro* scene (typically an opening scene in *wayang* performance, where wisdom messages are conveyed symbolically by *punakawan* or humorous figure). The New Order government was trying to find personnel who could function as agents of change, as a force to expand understanding and encourage "development" ("Membuka hutan mertani", 1969).

The *dalang's* role is that of a mediator between the play and the community, thus the *dalang* was very important in conveying messages from the government during the New Order era. The *dalang* performed every play and character with good improvisation to achieve transmitting these messages of development (Walujo, 1994). Additionally,

*wayang* shows incorporate traditional Javanese aesthetic concepts as mentioned above. Although print and electronic media were more frequently used in the New Order government, traditional media such as *wayang* had a greater impact, especially among people in rural areas (Hadi & Kasuma, 2012).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Several studies such as those of Gronendael and Victoria (1985), Walujo (1994), and Darmoko (2017) had written about *wayang* during the New Order era. Yet these previous studies did not discuss the delivery of messages or counseling from the government, and how the messages were delivered to the *wayang* show audience. Previous studies have focused on the creation of new plays, which occurred mostly toward the end of the New Order government era. Additionally, the role of *wayang* in the promotion of development by the New Order has been examined only in *wayang* characters or semiotic elements in the *wayang* characters.

The present research fills this gap by emphasizing how the New Order government saw art, especially *wayang*, as an extension tool to promote its programs. In this case, plays or scenes in *wayang* could be used to enable the viewers to receive government messages. To this day, the government and its authorities use *wayang* art as a means of gathering the masses. Performances, which are usually held overnight as they last approximately eight hours, not only contain teachings about life,

but also serve as a means of communication between the government authorities and the community.

This article discusses the factors behind the selection of *wayang* art as one of the tools for spreading messages of development, and how the New Order government implemented *wayang* art as a communications medium, which, according to our literature review, has not yet been sufficiently examined. This research used a historical method that consisted of four stages, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The authors had used historical sources, namely contemporary records and national archives, to support our research, as well as secondary sources in the form of books, journals, and interviews from *dalang* who performed during the New Order period. Additional data for this paper came from contemporary newspapers such as *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, and *Tempo* magazine. This article is expected to enrich the historiography of the New Order, especially on how the government viewed and utilized art pragmatically to achieve government goals.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Wayang Kulit* Art in Javanese Society

Indonesians have been familiar with *wayang* art for centuries, since before any foreign civilization influenced Indonesia, and even since before Hindu culture entered Indonesia. Long ago, *wayang* performances were very simple, consisting only of images that were described with the spoken word.

They began as Javanese religious ceremonies rooted in animistic beliefs and dynamism. Later, *wayang* performances began to get more complicated in the days of Javanese Hinduism.

*Wayang kulit* is one form of performance that is very popular and is favored by various layers of society in Java, especially in the regions of Central Java and East Java. Due to its popularity, *wayang kulit* is the only type of puppet show that has survived in Java to the present day. The word “*wayang*” (meaning puppet) comes from the Javanese “*wewayangan*,” which means shadow. It is said that *wayang* or *wewayangan* was so called because, in the old days, the audience stood in front of a screen called *kelir* while the *dalang* operated the *wayang* from the other side of the screen, which was lit by a lamp so that the *wayang* would cast a shadow onto the screen. The audience did not see the puppeteer, but only the shadow of the puppet, making it appear as if the shadow on the screen were a living human.

A *wayang kulit* is a two-dimensional puppet made of leather. Walujo (1995) had described the *wayang kulit* as a puppet doll made of animal skin - such as cow skin or buffalo - which had been flattened, cut, shaped, painted, and decorated with many colors to make the different characters more easily distinguishable.

Based on the source of the story, the types of puppets in Java include *wayang kulit purwa*, which originates from the stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabarata*, *wayang madya* from *Serat Pustaka Raja Madya*, *wayang gedhog* from *Serat Panji*,

*wayang klitik* from *Serat Damarwulan* (Mertosedono, 1986), *wayang golek* from *Serak Menak*, and *wayang beber* from *Serat Panji*. Other types of puppets that emerged in the twentieth century include, *wayang kancil* (stories about animals or stories from *Serat Kancil Kridamartana*), *wayang dupara* (stories of *babad*), *wayang suluh* (stories of the struggle to expel the Dutch colonial power), *wahyu* puppets from the *Serat Perjanjian Lama*, *wayang sadar* (stories from the *Wali Sanga*), and *wayang buda* (stories from *Sutasoma*). The types of puppets that still exist today include *wayang kulit purwa*, while others are said to be quite rare or even extinct nowadays (Soetarno et al., 2007).

The core of Javanese culture, though not its entirety, can be traced from *wayang*. *Wayang*, which was originally an oral storytelling method, is now a performance art. Like art in general, it has multiple functions such as conveying cultural messages directly or covertly and instilling and reinforcing certain cultural values. In disseminating knowledge, *wayang* can be a very reliable communication medium in a society that still relies on oral knowledge transmission and other unwritten traditions (Retno et al., 2017). Furthermore, Javanese culture, as the most populous subculture in Indonesia, has a considerable influence on the rest of Indonesian culture (Sardjono, 1995).

As mentioned previously, the literal meaning of *wayang* is “shadow,” but with the passage of time, the meaning of *wayang* has changed. At present, *wayang* can mean

stage shows or performances; it can also refer to actors and actresses (Guritno, 1988). Above all, the primary function of the *wayang* puppet theater is entertainment. It has been significant in the development of Javanese culture and its values, both philosophical and moral (Korsovitis, 2001).

The most popular form of *wayang* art is the *wayang kulit Purwa*. In essence, *wayang purwa* is described as symbolizing human life on earth. Puppet shows of various forms and types, regardless of when they were developed, are always referred to as *wayang purwa* shows. Of the many kinds of *wayang* theater performed in the archipelago - except in West Java - *wayang purwa* are consistently the most popular compared with other types of shows or puppets. The typical *wayang kulit purwa* play is full of life lessons and values, as they are intended to build up the character of the Javanese to help them live as quality human beings in accordance with Javanese culture.

In the course of its distribution, *wayang*, which was originally an oral tradition, was then developed into a written tradition in the form of literary work. After this development, the progress of the art form can be traced through examining the contents of the various written stories. Even when the stories are recorded in writing, there are often differences in the characteristics associated with characters, or inserted stories. *Wayang* thus reflects the path of the dualistic mind of the Javanese, who tend to divide things into two groups based on how they are opposite or contradictory, though, in reality, they may be similar (Sumaryoto, 1990).

It cannot be denied that the inventor and creator of *wayang kulit* was Javanese. Puppet art has become so embedded in the lives of Javanese people that it is now highly respected by every Javanese individual and its lessons are implemented in their lives. People learn the importance of values through *wayang* and are educated so that they can live well with the guidance of religious teachings. Since Indonesians now expect puppet shows to play this role, the more powerful a play's impact to the community because of its messages and values, the longer that play will be popular and entrenched in Indonesian society, especially among the Javanese people.

*Wayang* unites Javanese society as a whole in two ways. Horizontally in that, it is found in all geographic areas in Java, and vertically since it is enjoyed by all social groups in Javanese society (Koentjaraningrat, 1984). In *wayang kulit* - the most popular *wayang* in Java - the role of the puppeteer is central. It is the puppeteer who moves the puppet characters into "life," by improvising according to the puppeteer's ideas and concerns. The position of the puppets in Javanese culture is very central because *wayang* is at the core of Javanese culture. *Wayang* plays a role in Javanese culture, so the puppets serve as a reference for philosophy, orientation, behavior, and expectations of the Javanese people. The essence of Javanese culture is a person who has a *jiwa-jawi* (Javanese soul), in the sense that a person is considered Javanese if he applies his Javanese principles in his daily life (Achmad, 2013).

The stories in the puppet shows reflect the daily conditions and cultural orientation of the community at each moment in time. Therefore, it is not surprising that the transformation of *wayang* values and norms into Javanese culture takes place very intensively. Puppet theater culture is one of the elements that shape the Javanese personality. The *wayang* tradition is not only a means of preserving the inheritance of Javanese cultural values and norms but also has become mythology that serves as a source of inspiration for the dynamics of Javanese culture. On a broader scale, *wayang* mythology has been a tradition and culture that underlies and plays a major role in the form and character of Javanese culture (Gauthama et al., 2003).

### **Delivering the Message of Development Through *Wayang* Art**

In 1965, the New Order regime was born from a social and political coalition that opposed President Sukarno, the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* or the Communist Party of Indonesia) and left-wing groups in Indonesia during the previous years. Although many groups such as intellectuals, businessmen and political groups who were anti-communist were involved, the military leadership was the centre of the coalition. According to Aspinall & Fealy (2010), the first task of the New Order regime was to eradicate communist groups (the killings of approximately 500,000 persons in 1965-1966) and to establish a new administration with economic and political stability as its basis.

Prior to the New Order era, the world of *wayang* was marked by a competition between political parties seeking influence in society. Between 1960–1965, *pakeliran* (the Javanese term for performances or shadow puppet shows) in the villages were lively and profitable. In the harvest moon, puppet shows would always enliven the commemoration of national holidays and other important events. *Wayang* art is one type of folk art that was very popular with the public.

The political situation in the early 1960s was characterized by inter-party competition. Before 1965, political parties used the relationship between the community and local arts in their efforts to build support and consensus for their programs. The puppeteers were divided into three major groups called NASAKOM (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism). With the puppeteers divided along party lines, *wayang* shows were no longer merely rituals and sources of entertainment but were rather, used by the government both covertly and blatantly as a means of spreading propaganda on behalf of each political party. Among the major parties that existed at the time, the Indonesian Communist Party aided a great deal of attention to the potential of the *dalang* in mobilizing the people for their party's purposes.

According to Soetarno et al. (2007), after the events of 1965, art activities throughout Indonesia stalled for about half a year. Some puppeteers who had been members of certain parties were killed or imprisoned, while others who were suspected of having

been involved with the Communist Party movement were prohibited from playing for a certain time (Kuwato, 2001). As a result of these events, in the next few years, the world of puppetry became lonely and stagnant. This freezing of the puppeteers' creativity, especially among the progressors of the *keraton*, was resisted by some puppeteers, especially Ki Nartosabdo, who developed a new form of caressing with fresh nuances, hilarious conversations, and interludes with various creations (Soetarno et al., 2007).

A year after the events of 1965, as many as 60 puppeteers gathered in Surakarta, invited by Soeharto. They listened to F. Soetrisno, the head of the Central Java Cultural Affairs Inspectorate; deliver a lecture titled “*Orde Baru dan Seni Pendalangan*” (The New Order and The Art of *Dalang*). Soetrisno stated that artists must be careful because of their responsibility to society and must ensure that they were not lax in paying attention to social problems (Gronendael & Victoria, 1985). In realizing the programs from the beginning of the New Order government, Soeharto approached the *dalang* in a planned and slow manner.

Soeharto's approach to the *dalang* was implemented even before he was serving as President. This was in line with Soeharto's background as a Javanese man who adhered to the teachings of *alon-alon asal kelakon* (Javanese proverb, means ‘slow but sure’ as a literal translation). He considered that the role of art and culture was important in fostering a healthy society and that art must be based on Pancasila. The New Order would later fight to influence all fields, including culture and art (Soeharto, 1967).

Entering the New Order era, President Soeharto used Javanese culture as a reference in the implementation of leadership management given to the wider community. Soeharto's policy toward the growth of culture during his reign was undeniably an implementation of the factors of interest to be achieved. On the one hand, Soeharto used culture as a vehicle to strengthen his power; on the other hand, he strangled culture by prohibiting and limiting spaces for cultural expression.

Soeharto, as the center of the New Order, realized that traditional *wayang* art could be used to communicate his ideas to the community. Soeharto requested that all *dalang* to make *wayang* plays that could be used as two-way communication for the development and application of Pancasila in everyday life. This was conveyed by Soeharto after *Pekan Wayang Nasional II* (the Second National *Wayang* Week) in late March 1974 and was delivered through a speech without script. (“Harapan kepala negara”, 1974). Two important aspects of *wayang kulit*, history and religion, were seen as particularly useful to Soeharto because they could influence people's thinking. History essentially connects the collective lineage of Javanese people who live in the world today to the ancestors who appear in the *wayang kulit*, in stories that are understood as myths. Myths that are linked with history strengthen people's belief in the relevance of *wayang* to their lives (Darmoko, 2017).

These aspects are not the only reasons why Soeharto chose *wayang* as his trumpet to deliver his programs to the public.

Soeharto's passion towards the art of *wayang* is ingrained since childhood. He acknowledged that the roots of the village and the environment in which he lived were always in the midst of *wayang*. In other words, the philosophy of *wayang* is embedded in him (Soeharto, 1989). He was also driven by the fact that around 80% of Indonesia's population at that time lived and worked in rural areas. Such communities were generally too poor to have newspapers, radios, or televisions. Only 20% lived in urban areas with access to these media. In other words, rural communities largely depended on traditional arts such as *wayang kulit* as the basis of their media and information.

Even though radio and television already existed in several villages, the delivery of information to rural communities with low levels of education had to be done slowly. Usually, the people responsible for providing this information were the village heads or the *dalang*. Although newspapers also existed, people still depended on *wayang* as a source of information from the outside world because they were entertaining and useful (Walujo, 1995). On the one hand, the *dalang* also did not mind conveying messages from the urban centers to the people in the countryside because the *dalang* themselves were also given a lot of assistance and attention by the government ("Sekitar pekan wajang Indonesia", 1969).

Apart from Javanese people, *wayang* art also affected many people living outside Java. *Wayang* arts are spread not only in Java, but also to people in major islands in Indonesia. Many of them are mainly young

people who perceived *wayang* not merely as entertainment, but there are lessons that can be obtained. Some of them knew *wayang* after visiting Java and introduced them to their hometown. ("Suara-suara anak muda sana sini", 1974). Some people from Manado, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi also knew a lot about *wayang* because of the widespread performances that were held since the beginning of the New Order government ("Harapan kepala negara", 1974). Reflecting on numerous people outside Java who knew and understood about *wayang*, Soeharto did not hesitate to choose *wayang* as a medium of information for the community.

In December 1966, shortly after the bloody coup of 1965 terminated Indonesia's move toward communism, the government held a meeting between the *dalang* and high-ranking officials in the government. The meeting discussed the position of the *dalang* in the community, especially in normalizing the post-1965 situation. (Gronendael & Victoria, 1985) To effectively utilize *wayang* art, Soeharto made use of the great *dalang* because they were already considered community leaders, and it was easy to gather masses of people who were willing to listen to them. The task of the *dalang* became obvious during a meeting in Jakarta on April 10–14, 1969, which was attended by 59 *dalangs* from various regions in Indonesia (Bali, East Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta, West Java, Jakarta, Lampung, and Medan). President Soeharto also took part in a meeting with the Minister of Information and the Minister of Education and Culture. He asked the *dalang* to stimulate the

public's awareness of their responsibilities as citizens. Soeharto explained that the *dalang* must protect the community to carry out their duties in development. According to Soeharto, the *dalang* function to propagate government messages to the public by using *wayang* stories. (Schechner, 1990).

In October of 1969, the *dalang* held a meeting and agreed on several points. Among them are: 1) fulfilling the function as artist and teacher in *wayang* arts, 2) respecting and maintaining the integrity of the culture in *wayang* arts, 3) devoting all their strengths, together with the whole nation, developing the country, under the auspices of government programs, and 4) unite in cooperation. (Gronendael & Victoria, 1985) At the same time, masterminds are in an institution sponsored by the government and under military supervision. In July 1969, the government established Ganasidi (*Lembaga Pembina Seni Pedalangan Indonesia / Institute for the Development of Indonesian Dalang Arts*) in Semarang, Central Java. In 1971, the government established Pepadi (*Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia / Indonesian Dalang Association*). The two organizations shaded by Golkar (state-sponsored political party), the work programs of these organizations included holding *wayang* shows and carrying out *wayang* festivals held every five years (Pausacker, 2004).

In late 1960s, Bappenas (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional / the National Development Planning Council) was dominated by a new generation of

Western-educated economists and technocrats led by Professor Widjojo Nitisastro. The council proposed and implemented a sequence of five-year plans. The initial plan is REPELITA I (The First Five-Year Development Plan), which implemented in 1969–1973. The plan focused on infrastructure and production of staple foods. (“The State and Economic Development”, 1993). The main emphasis of REPELITA I was regarding the economic sector, especially in the agricultural sector where most of the Indonesian population worked. Extensive attention was also given to attempts in suppressing the number of births, with the view to prevent the ineffectiveness of economic growth caused by uncontrolled population growth. Such a plan could not succeed unless the people, especially villagers, were willing to participate in the plan.

The government focused on establishing the basic institutions that were needed for economic development. Because most Indonesians were rural dwellers, the focus of the strategy was primarily on promoting the rural economy and specifically achieving rice self-sufficiency. Agriculture, including irrigation, received one-third of the development budget during the REPELITA I period. This period was a trial for the design and implementation of many future development programs (Husken et al., 1997).

In line with the implementation of REPELITA, which began on April 1, 1969, the *dalang* were used by the government to disseminate development programs through

*pakeliran*, to inspire the community through awareness so that they would participate in development programs. *Wayang* at that time was indeed an entertainment that was in great demand in all circles. Any show that was performed, whether in a city or village, was packed with spectators and vendors so that the theater looked like an impromptu night market. When the *dalang* had started the play, there was reciprocity between the *dalang* and the community, by which, in addition to being entertained, the audience also learned from the *dalang*.

Most farmers and rural communities, especially in Java, were still very traditional in their way of life and thinking. The government needed their cooperation, and one of the easiest ways to sway them was through the actions of *dalang* who served as community leaders. As a Javanese man who had lived among such people, Soeharto understood how *wayang* could be a suitable spearhead of communication on behalf of the programs he was promoting in the community, especially in the villages. As explained above, the task of the *dalang* was clear by April 1969. At that time, Soeharto explained at length how the Five-Year Development Plan would have to work. He explained that the *dalang* would have to help convince the masses to take up their tasks.

Soeharto continued making his point regarding the five-year program previously presented at a meeting on April 10–14, 1969, especially regarding the delivery of messages in the agricultural sector. The goal was to increase the availability of food and to work diligently for farming

communities, then to deliver messages first on social topics, and later on the main priorities related to population control. The tasks of the *dalang* and the role of *wayang* in promoting these programs took place during the New Order government. The main concern during REPELITA I (1969–1974) to REPELITA III (1979–1984), was development in the economic, agrarian, and social sectors.

After introducing REPELITA to the *dalang*, the President then described several plans and a timeframe for the future. The President highlighted important points that were directly related to the community, such as clothing and food, primarily in the agricultural development and industrial development sectors. At this point, the President asked the *dalang* to help him recruit the masses and inform them of their duties. It was hoped that they could devote their energy toward helping REPELITA succeed and preparing for the future. Soeharto's believed that this would allow the puppeteers to convey information to the public by not departing from existing standards (Gronendael & Victoria, 1985).

After the meeting in April, the government, together with *Ganasidi* (*Lembaga Pembina Seni Perdalangan Indonesia*) held the first *Pekan Wayang Nasional I* (National Puppet Week) in Jakarta at the end of July 1969. The aim was to create a space to bring *dalang* together and a means of channeling aspirations between the government and the community through the puppeteers (“Sekitar pekan wayang Indonesia”, 1969) After the government

proved its seriousness through *Pekan Wayang Nasional I*, the answers of the *dalang* then came out in October of the same year. They agreed and promised to hold fast to the art of puppetry, and to help the government carry out its development programs (Gronendael & Victoria, 1985).

With the *dalang* staying true to the traditions of *wayang* puppetry and providing information through *wayang* plays, the *dalang* and the people were expected to avoid negative incitement and any potential failure of REPELITA I. Through *wayang*, Soeharto ensured that REPELITA I and REPELITA II were two brothers who would work together to give birth to the next REPELITA. Upon returning to their respective regions, the *dalang* were expected to learn about the development on both local and national levels. Daily life must also be stressed with regard to the philosophy of Pancasila through *wayang* (“Suara-suara anak muda sana sini”, 1974).

For them to provide guidance to the community, the *dalang* was required to master many subjects to become *mumpuni* (qualified), in Javanese terms. A *dalang* had to be a person of quality beyond other members of the community, and had to be able to provide lessons; thus, he had to study long and hard to prepare for this role. The *dalang* had to function as an artist, an entertainer, a teacher, and as a speaker (“Dalang Laris”, 1982). The additional functions of a *dalang* included those of a communicator, instructor, trainer, educator, and member of the clergy, who was always obliged to invite the community to do well

according to the teachings of their respective religions (Sujamto, 1992).

In President Soeharto’s speech that opened the third National Puppet Week which was held on August 1-4, 1978 (Soeharto, 1978), he advised the *dalang* to become the medium of information:

“... *The art of dalang is not a simple thing. Because wayang stories do not only contain literary values but also philosophical values. Therefore, an artist mastermind is essentially a communicator who delivers certain messages through puppetry ... so in fact he can take part to direct the development of our nation, especially the huge number of wayang lovers. As a citizen of a developing country, it is appropriate if a dalang can slip a development message to his audience ... The message of development can be conveyed, while the integrity of the puppet art is not disturbed.*”

In providing pro-development or counseling messages, the *dalang* used *lakon wahyu* more often than the other types of plays. According to the puppeteer Ki Sukatno, this type of play is the most flexible, which makes it useful for conveying messages. Therefore, it is commonly used as a medium for campaigns and other information efforts. *Lakon wahyu* was highly favored by the Indonesian society, and its flexibility meant that it could be staged at any number of events such as campaigns or celebrations. In addition, the plays

performed sometimes depended on requests from the audience. In addition to using *lakon wahyu*, many *dalang* also used war plays and slapstick shows because these were liked by the people (“Memasyarakatkan wayang kulit Purwa gaya Jawa”, 1977).

Government messages conveyed by *ki dalang* were often presented in the form of a dialog, song, or comedy routine through a *goro-goro* scene (commonly read *gara-gara*) or a first-track scene. Many scenes in *wayang* plays told about the destruction caused when a natural disaster hit a country. However, in every episode or play of a *wayang* performance, the characters successfully overcame whatever problem was presented. The *dalang* who performed these shows later recounted that, after the end of a show, the *punakawan* would appear with a happy expression and a humorous attitude to tell jokes. This was symbolic of the belief that, after any chaos or rioting, the small people rather than the *ndoro* were the first party to benefit.

The *goro-goro* scene was considered by the *dalang* as the scene in which they were most free to talk about anything they chose, or to offer information and social criticism. In addition to this, government messages conveyed through *goro-goro* scenes should not damage the beauty of the performance or to depart from tradition. The first *Jejer*, which was also used by the *dalang* to convey government messages, is the first scene in a *wayang* performance and is also referred to as the opening; in it, the *dalang* begins by describing the situation of the country where the story will take place.

One such scene, for example, consists of a dialog between a king and his ministers who were trying to determine how they would address a problem. However, in this introductory scene, the puppeteer was not as free to deliver illuminating messages as in the *goro-goro* scene.

Opportunities such as the *goro-goro* and *punakawan* plays were used to convey messages about familiar situations that occurred in everyday life. One message, for example, was concerned about the condition of the neighborhood of the RT (*Rukun Tetangga* / Neighborhood Association) after it had rained: muddy and full of garbage, with clogged drains. According to the puppeteer Ki Anom Suroto (“Penanggungan para dalang”, 1981), difficult messages were usually handed down to the *dalang* by the officials, who would ask the *dalang* to incorporate these messages into the main story of the play, as this was considered to make the message “more authoritative.” Yet behind it all was the ability of the puppeteers themselves to work the puppets, and even when they were not specifically tasked with a message, they often inserted development-related messages promoting such programs as P4 (Upgrading Course on the Directives for the Realization and Implementation of Pancasila, family planning, and the election itself (“Penanggungan para dalang”, 1981).

Walujo (2000) provided us with one example in which a dialog or slapstick routine between *punakawan* in a *goro-goro* scene which conveyed a development-related message:

Petruk: Bagong's trademark is that, if he is not called by the sound of the gamelan, he does not want to come. Especially seeing the temple lights already lit with kerosene. Already ... Let me call with the *gending dolanan*, maybe Gareng and Bagong will match the sound now. At this time the atmosphere of our country is under construction. Not only are the cities being built, but even the villages are not missing out. Even though the country has developed, if it is not also intentionally clean, of course the atmosphere is not beautiful. Therefore, cleanliness is very necessary. For example, in cities, people throw garbage and litter in a ditch, in a river. But in the rainy season, the garbage can cause clogged drains that can cause flooding. Even though the village also does this, poor hygiene results in poor quality of health. Therefore, there is cleanliness of the city and also the cleanliness of the village. Remember, keep a clean *gending* village.

Bagong: Every Petruk appears to be always grumbling. Indeed, in reality, cleanliness is the foundation of health. In order not to disturb the mind, let's work together with the neighbors, so there will be no dispute later.

These Dagelan Petruk and Bagong plays contain development-related messages about village cleanliness and mutual cooperation. *Ki dalang* was trying to convey development messages about cleanliness in a language that would be easily understood by the

audience. The delivery of this message would usually be supported by punakawan gestures, which would make the audience laugh, so that the messages would not be boring.

Such insertions could be done *medhang miring* (smoothly) into a standard scene, or delivered through *nyampar pakoleh*, i.e., unofficial scenes such as *Limbuk-Cangik* scenes or *perang ampyak* that would be added to a show. Dialog in unofficial scenes was usually inserted in the form of a short message with the aim of informing the audience briefly rather than explaining an issue in detail. One example is in the following scene:

Cangik: Human life is completely opposite, boy.

Limbuk: What?

Cangik: Wealth so much, no children. I have nothing, every month I keep bothering to the point that I never perform. Because I have more children.

Limbuk: It's natural. You don't use calculations yourself, teachings that have been disseminated for the welfare of the new family. Planning family development, that is, Family Planning, must be carried out, not only understood.

Cangik: Yes, already. I'm 70 years old, what do I want? But the arena for giving the power is sometimes you still want to give birth again. Even though your father has me "*streng*."

Limbuk: What horse is in the *streng*?

The message conveyed in this piece about the Family Planning program was inserted into an unofficial scene in a *cangik* and *limbuk* play, as implied by *Ki dalang*.

## CONCLUSION

The use of the *wayang* theater genre as a means of distributing messages about development programs cannot be separated from the fact that the island of Java has the largest population of any of the Indonesian islands. *Wayang* holds a central position in Javanese society and is regularly used as a guide for human life and activity. The New Order government considered *wayang* as a potentially effective tool for conveying information to the public, especially in villages. The tradition of *wayang*, especially the shadow puppets used in Java, is considered to play a major role in preserving and transmitting Javanese culture. The stories in *wayang* reflect the lives and everyday conditions of the Javanese people.

The modern use of *wayang* is inseparable from its long history. As a form of performance, it is very popular and is favored by people in all levels of the society in Indonesia. *Wayang* can also be used pragmatically as a tool to achieve government goals and interests. It is no wonder that Soeharto, who was Javanese himself, saw *wayang* as something that could attract the masses and serve as an effective means of disseminating information about development programs during the New Order.

Before the New Order era arrived, *wayang* art had long been used as a propaganda tool. At the beginning of the New Order era, *wayang* performers were charged with a specific task under the supervision of the government and especially under the Ministry of Information. In keeping with the ongoing Five-Year Development Plan, the main concerns of this plan were the economic, food security, and social sectors. *Wayang* was able to attract people, especially those in villages with limited access to other media, to find out directly about the programs recommended by the government. Using introductory and *goro-goro* scenes, the *dalang* willingly helped the government in this way.

This study has attempted to examine the extent to which state relations affect art and to which performers can be political messengers. The relations between the society, the *dalang*, and the government, can explain the importance of *wayang* art as a medium of propaganda in the New Order era. This research also confirms that the New Order government is filled with Javanese culture, and the New Order government perpetuated the culture through *wayang* arts. The relationship about *wayang* and its impact on society as a government instrument is still a major issue worthy of further exploration.

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