

## **Potehi Puppet (布袋戲) in Java**

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### **Abstract**

*Potehi* (布袋戲) puppet theater in Java is called as Chinese puppet and originated from Fujian (福建) and Guangdong (广东) Province. Chinese puppets that were allegedly meant here is *Potehi* because the forms of other kinds of puppet theater from China was not discovered the traces. Leather puppet, such as Purwa, or string puppet (marionette), or even Rod puppet is not recognized by the Javanese people, most of them are only familiar with *Potehi* Chinese puppet. This is confirmed by the data that most Chinese emigrants who came to Java is the Hokkien (Fujian) who owned *Potehi* puppet theater. Some of *Potehi* playhouse stage are in the form of permanent building of a brick wall that has been decorated with images of deities or knock-down building which is similar to ronda substations that can be assembled. When *Potehi* stage is used for shows in pagoda, it will be included in the playhouse stage. It is different if the shows take place outside the pagoda, such as in malls, galleries, churches, festivals and so on, then it will be without the playhouse stage. *Potehi* stage shaped like a castle building with division of imaginary spaces. The upper part is the sky or deities' palace, and the bottom is the human castle. It can also be interpreted as two natures; macrocosm and microcosm. The Sky Palace keep supervising the administration of human castles that have been mandated to regulate human. General grip of *Potehi* Puppet Theatre in Java includes: material story and a common way of presenting the general grip of the story of *Potehi* Puppet Theatre in Java that include: materials and way of presenting sequence actions stories that are taken by sehu and the board of pagoda when holding *Potehi* show in pagoda are as follow: 1. Sehu prepares the figures. 2. Sehu with Lauw Cu (the board of pagoda) perform Puak Poe rituals. 3. Sehu prepare the staging equipment. 4. The show is based on the agreed time with pagoda sides. *Potehi* shows for the Chinese community carry out ritual, social, and educational functions.

Keywords: puppet theater; *Potehi*; Javanese performance

### **Abstrak**

**Wayang Potehi di Jawa.** Teater Boneka *Potehi* di Jawa disebut sebagai pertunjukan boneka Cina yang berasal dari Provinsi Fujian dan Guandong. Diduga pertunjukan *Potehi* datang ke Pulau Jawa pada abad ke-16. Wayang *Potehi* dikenal sebagai wayang Cina karena bentuknya tidak ditemukan di wilayah Jawa. Wayang kulit di Jawa sama dengan wayang Purwa, wayang bertangkai di Jawa dikenal dengan wayang golek. Teater boneka *Potehi* dibawa para emigran Hokkian (Fujian) ke Jawa, dan dimainkan pada panggung permanen ataupun panggung yang berpindah. Ketika pertunjukan *Potehi* dimainkan di Kelenteng, digunakan *stage* yang permanen berbentuk rumah-rumahan. Hal demikian berbeda dengan pertunjukan yang dimainkan di luar Kelenteng, seperti di mal, galeri seni, gereja, atau festival-festival. Panggung *Potehi*

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merupakan perwujudan simbol dunia, yakni paling atas adalah istana langit yang merupakan tempat para dewa, sementara bagian bawah adalah istana manusia biasa atau tempat masyarakat biasa. Hal tersebut dapat digambarkan sebagai alam makrokosmos dan alam mikrokosmos. Secara keseluruhan, pementasan *Potehi* di Jawa masih mengikuti patokan, lakon, tatacara *Potehi* asalnya, yaitu: 1. Sehu atau dalang menyiapkan lakon dan mengajukan judul lakon yang akan dibawakan. 2. Sehu bersama Lauw Cu (petugas upacara) melakukan ritual Puak Poe. 3. Sehu mendapatkan persetujuan mengenai lakon yang akan dibawakan. 4. Pertunjukan digelar berdasarkan lakon yang telah disetujui dewa. Pertunjukan *Potehi* bagi komunitas masyarakat Tionghoa membawa serta fungsi sosial, ritual, dan pendidikan.

Kata kunci: teater boneka; *Potehi*; pertunjukan Jawa

## Introduction

Puppet theatre in Java is usually called *wayang*. The title of *wayang* initially meant a shadow show. As time goes by, all kinds of shows in Java using puppet actors, both two dimensional and three dimensional, are called *wayang*. This paper used the term puppet theater as a translation of *puppetry* which refers to *Potehi*. The term *puppetry* is internationally used in discussions about puppet drama show, including *Potehi*.

*Potehi* puppet theater is one of puppet theater (wooden puppet) from Fujian or Hokkian (福建). The word *Potehi* in Indonesian is derived from Southern Fujian dialect. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* explains *Potehi* puppet theater as 'Chinese wooden puppet'. It shows that the *Potehi* puppet theater originated from China. The wooden puppet tradition (puppet theater) originated from China, and it has been known since Siong Theng Dynasty (3000 years ago). The Chinese puppet theater supposedly has had a link with the development of wooden puppet theater which was also found in Hunan (Yunan), Sichuan, Shanxi, Guangdong, and Jiangsu Province. It was also assumed that the tradition of wooden puppet had older age than the development of the puppet theater which has been known since the Song Dynasty (in 960-1278). The puppet theater was peaking at the Ming Dynasty (明) in 1368-1644 until the Qing Dynasty (清) in 1644-1911 (Mastuti cited in Kuardhani, 2011).

The puppet theater in China is known in various forms. The puppet theater forms are

wooden, leather, rod, string (marionette), and glove puppet. In addition, there is one puppet which is part of glove puppet namely *Potehi* puppet theater.

According to Dictionary of *Cihai* (Chinese Dictionary), Chinese puppet show originated from Han Dynasty (206SM - 220M) and Song Dynasty (宋) (960M - 1279M). *Potehi* was popular around South Fujian and Taiwan. Dialogues and songs of *Potehi* used Southern Fujian dialect accompanied by music; the used of them was found in Quanzhou area accompanied by music Nanqu, while in the Zhangzhou region early was accompanied by Jingdiao music, then it was replaced using Xiangju Opera song until it finally changed with opera song (Yuanzhi, 2005: 319).

*Potehi* puppet theater in its original country was known as *Pouw Tee Hie*. *Pouw Teemeans* sac or sack, *Hie* means drama. Lombart (1996: 327) mentioned that *Potehi* is also called *Budaixi* (布袋戲) which is derived from the word *Budai* (sac or sheath). The term *Budaixi* is a Chinese term that is the national language of China today. *Pouw Tee Hie* is a Hokkian dialect language [Fukien or Fujian (建)]. According to Gie, a senior puppeteer from Semarang, the word *Potehi* derives from *Poo* word which means fabric, *Tay* word which means sac, and *Hie* which means puppet (Kuardhani, 2014: 20). Thus, *Potehi* literally means a puppet glove or a puppet theater of a glove. According to Stalberg (1984: 27), among puppet show researchers, the *Potehi* puppet theater from Fujian or Fukien (建) is known by some English names those

are cloth bag theatre, theatre the within the palm or *tjiangtionghie*, and art on the palm. Wu Wei Yun stated that *Potehi* was a glove theater known as *zhangzhongmuou* or *budaixi*; it was also popular with the name of *zhihuaxi* or finger puppet show [Stalberg, 1984: 27].

Chinese Dictionary says that *Potehi* is a wooden puppet with a cloth bag, a type of puppet show. *Potehi* wooden puppet is rather small, the head is connected with a cloth bag, and the outside is worn on stage clothes. The hand of artists were put into the bag to control the motion of the puppet, so it is also called a hand puppet (Yuanzi, 2005: 319).

The art of glove puppet theater or a handbag in Southern China is passed from parent (father) to his child, from generation to generation as preservation and respect for tradition. The Fujian community is proud of their theater arts. Fujian was the center for *Potehi* puppet theater (gloves), as revealed by Stalberg (1984: 27) below:

Fujian has long been an important center for Chinese puppetry, and particularly hand puppet theatre, one might even call it the heart of classical Chinese Puppetry. And for this reason, although hand puppetry of other region must be mentioned, our focus will be on the cloth bag theatre of Fujian.

The existence of glove puppet has been believed before 16<sup>th</sup> century, and it was the creation of a learned scholar in Fujian who wanted to protest openly against treason by Wei Zhongxian eunuch (Stalberg, 1984: 27). There were various versions of *Potehi*'s origin. Along with the migration of Hokkian people (Fujian/福建) to Lam-Yang/Nan-Yang (Southern sea), *Potehi* puppet theater also migrated.

## Discussion

### ***Potehi* Puppet Theater Show (布袋戲) in Java**

*Potehi* puppet theater was allegedly identified as cultural contact between Indonesia and Chinese tribes in the younger

period. According to Haryono (2004: 49), the beginning of *Potehi* puppet theater was known on the island of Java.

In ancient Javanese times of the X century, puppet shows were well known, and Chinese puppet which was one of the show was even interesting to be mentioned. Those term appeared in younger manuscripts such as Malat and *Nawaruci*. In *Nawaruci* was stated *Anggambuh*, *amancangah*, *alangang-karanmwangawayang China*. In Malat was mentioned *amancangah*, *angringgit China*. It showed that Chinese puppet reached Java around the XVI or XVII century.

From that opinion, it was suspected that Chinese puppet or Chinese *aringgit* was a form of *Potehi* puppet because there was no other type of Chinese puppet theater which has been found in Java. Puppet theater was known for its various types in China, It was similar to Graff's opinion (1998: 190-191) that the similarities between the various types of Javanese puppet and the appearance of Chinese puppet were also known in various forms, but it was difficult to be proved that there was Chinese influence although it was not impossible. Holt (2000: 163) cited the opinion of Serrurier and Sutaarga who mentioned that among the Chinese immigrants, it was known round puppets, but they were hand puppet and strapped *Marionette*. If Javanese borrowed the idea of round puppets from China, it might be natural for them to change the finger or rope techniques which were known by them for a long time. According to Brandon (2003: 73-74), *Potehi* puppet form in Java came from China in earlier times, it seen from the following quotation:

It was not clear when *Potehi* was first shown in Java, but it was probably not before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a large number of Chinese migrated to Java. In *Potehi* Chinese stories were displayed with Chinese-dressed puppets, but the language spoken by them was Indonesian. It was quite ironic, among many

forms of Indonesian performing arts, Indonesian as a national language was only used on *Potehi* which was primary from China. Twenty to twenty-five *Potehi* puppet troupes operate in Java. They live in Surabaya and Semarang, the two largest cities on the island of Java which have a large Chinese community. These groups mainly hold shows for Buddhist *padeitya* birthday celebrations. They never hold shows in the public hall and not for private events.

The central tradition in China or the higher Chinese tradition considers puppet theater as a low form of popular entertainment. The puppet theater is associated with pleasure of the less educated people, the illiterate peasants, and the workers. They are the group population of the majority of emigrants who came to Java. One of the reasons why Chinese central tradition was suspicious to puppet theaters related to its function that was as a ritual of evil spirits (Rozenendaal in Groenendaal 1993: 19). In the past precisely in Java, it was possibly thought that puppet theater *Potehi* was linked to the ritual of evil spirits, as Groenendaal described:

In Java too in the past there may possibly have been a link between *Potehi* and exorcism as has been suggested by Poensens article. I have no conclusive evidence of more recent exorcistical practices.

In the pre-New Order period, *Potehi* puppet theater show can easily be found in various places and events. At the Jakarta Fair, *Cap Go Meh* Celebration, and Java Annual Fair (*Sekatenan* night market) in Yogyakarta, a small theater was established exclusively for *Potehi* puppet show. In 1963 in the city of Semarang, it was easy to find a group of *Potehi* puppet theaters which showed shows spontaneously in various places, such as markets and bus terminals that many people gathered. The stage was placed on a bullock cart, so the players can carry the stage without having to unpack and install if it moved the stage (Groenendaal, 1993: 19).

Since public shows were prohibited during the New Order era, *Potehi* puppet theaters can only be viewed in the *padeitya* environment that is in the front yard (Kuardhani, 2018: 32). The audiences are the womb Chinese community that embraces *Tri dharma*. Most *padeityas* have a permanent building for the *Potehi* stage, but there are also *padeityas* that have a knock-down building which is similar to a guardhouse. House of the stage can be reworking to put *Potehi* stage if it is needed and will be dismantled when the show is done.

*Potehi* puppet theater or otherwise known as *Potehi* puppet, during the Reformation has been started outside the *padeitya*. *Gus Dur* issued Indonesia Presidential Decree No. 6 Year 2000 on the Revocation of Presidential Instruction no. 14 Year 1967 on Religion, Belief, and Chinese Customs which established as follow:

- First : Revoke the Presidential Instruction Number 14 Year 1967 on religion, belief, and customs of Chinese
- Second : With the enactment of this Presidential Decree, all existing implementation provisions due to Presidential Instruction No. 14 Year 1967 concerning Chinese religion, beliefs and customs shall be declared null and void.
- Third : It organizes religious activities, beliefs, and customs of China to be implemented without the need for special permits as it goes on.
- Fourth : This Presidential Decree is issued on the date of stipulation.

Since the enactment of the Presidential Decree, the *Potehi* show revived and began to be held outside the *padeitya* (Kuardhani, 2018: 32).

The *Potehi* puppet theater belongs to Chinese womb community in Java was originally from Hokkien, it brought to the coastal areas of Java, and it became an interesting form of shows. *Potehi* puppet theater has adapted to the situation in Java. The *Potehi* show initially used Hokkian language, then it used the low Malay as Chinese womb ethnic intermediate language, and it currently

uses Indonesian language. *Sehuor* puppeteer *Potehi* do not only come from Chinese ethnic, but it also comes from Javanese who are Moslem, and the number of them is huge.

*Potehi* puppet theater show originally belonged to the Hokkian Chinese community. As time goes by, other Chinese ethnics in Java felt that they shared the art of the *Potehi* show, even today the Chinese ethnic outside Java also feel that they have art of *Potehi*. This is due to the fact that other Chinese ethnic do not have the art of puppet which is brought in overseas and they see Chinese characteristics in the *Potehi* show, so *Potehi* performing art has been considered to represent the embodiment of Chinese identity (China).

In its development, the Chinese womb in Java, even outside Java, regarded *Potehi* as theirs. *Potehi* puppet has a wider scattering power compared to *Gantung* puppet in Singkawang. This is due to *Potehi* puppet theater show in its development using low Malay language which is a lingua franca for Chinese tribes particularly in Java, and generally in Indonesia. Then *Potehi* puppet theater develops using Indonesian.

The sequences of actions which are undertaken by *Sehu* and the *padeitya* administrator when performing the *Potehi's* (布袋戲) show in the *padeitya* are as follows:

1. *Sehu* makes a list of plays on a note or paper.
2. Ritual of *Puak Poe*. A *lauw cu* or *padeitya* administrator and *Sehu* do *Puak Poe* ceremony that is burning incense and doing *sojathree* times to Deity who is

worshiped at the *padeitya*. After the prayer, *Sehu* proposes the titles of the story, then he tosses the seeds of *puakpoein* front of Deity's statue. If the seeds of *puakpoeare* open all, it means that the Deity agree with the proposed play.

3. After performing the ritual of play title submitting, *Sehu* immediately prepares the homes for the *Potehi* stage, organizes the puppets to be played, and contacts the musician's crew.
4. Prepare the offerings before the play.

Then some offerings are prepared by *padeitya's* party for the initial show in a number of days that the *padeitya* wants. Shows for the *padeitya* can be done in one day, two days, even one week or more, depending on the funds owned by the *padeitya* and the decision of the board meeting. Mandatory stage is usually done only in one day. When the stage for the *padeitya* is finished, then the *Potehi* stage for the next days is joined by the *padeitya's* congregation who want to perform *Potehi* stage for the vow ceremony. Therefore, the owner of the event provides offerings. The offerings are started from simple offering which consist of only three kinds of fruit (oranges, apples, and pears) to the complete offerings.

Simple offerings consist of three types of fruit, and the each number of them is three called *samseng*, for example three oranges, three apples, and three pears, while the offerings which have five amount of each are called *ngoseng*. Fruit for the purposes of offerings can vary, only durian fruit is



Figure 1. Ti Pat Kai, student of Tong Sam Cong.



Figure 2. She Go Cing, student of Tong Sam Cong.

prohibited. Complete offerings are fruits of at least three types (oranges, apples, and pears), roast pork or soy sauce, one chicken cock, a milkfish, various cakes, such as cupcakes, apple cakes, sponge cake, spring rolls, steamed cakes, and others. After the show, offerings can be brought the owner of event to be eaten by his/her family because it is believed that offerings have got blessings from the deity. At the *Potehi* show shows, *sehu* begins to play a story that has been approved by deity which is worshiped in pagoda.

The form of the show is everything that is presented in a show, from start to finish, containing certain principles and rules of the show. Each type of show has a distinctive form because it has principles and rules that are different from other types of shows. The following is a form of puppet show *Potehi* theater in Java.

1. *Lauw Tee* (opening musical instrument)  
Starting the show of *Potehi*, it will be played an opening music like *giro* in Javanese leather puppet stage. *Giro* is the term of the *sehu* to call the booming opening music. In a Javanese show, there is *Kebo Giro* music for bridal gatherings. The *sehu* also called *Giro* for the bride's music. It is intended as a greeting opener and to attract the attention of the audience and the deity if it is staged in pagoda. The opening music is repeated approximately three to four times.
2. Burning gold banknotes (*kimcoa*)  
It is done by *sehu*, then it is circled around *Potehi* stage. The show was performed on



Figure 3. Four Deities descending from the sky.

the first day of the show and the last day of the show.

3. *PhayShiu* (*Ho Sing/TyuLiongTeng*)  
In the *Potehi* show which is performed in pagoda, there is a scene of *PhayShiu*. It is a scene to chant a prayer witnessed by four deities, and it is performed before staging. The scene is a must-do scene for the *Potehi* event performed inside the pagoda. When the prayer is prompted, there are four deities descending from the sky, namely Deity of Lam Kek Sian Ong (Deity of Longevity) in yellow, Deity of Jay Sen Yik (Deity of Fortune) in red, Deity of Goat Hee Lo Djin Sian (Deity who holds a matchmaking book of human) in blue or green, and Deity of Siauw Tong Cu (Deity of Descendants) who is tangible as little kid in red.  
In non-ritual shows, such as shows at malls, galleries, churches, or on cultural weekend events and others, the scene is not presented, and *sehu* will open the scene immediately.
4. *Kek Hwan*  
After the four deities came down, they give their bless and pray, the scene is continued with the emergence of Fortune Deity (Jay Sen Yik) under the ministries and red shirts. That scene is a compulsory scene.
5. Introduction scene  
If the *Potehi* show is not in pagoda, *sehu* will use one of the puppets (not the Deity of Fortune) after the opening instrument to introduce the plays which will be presented and the purpose of show.



Figure 4. Appears a pair of young brides symbolizing happiness. (Photo was taken by Hirwan Kuardhani)

6. Main Scene (show of the play)

The styling pattern differs from each play, after the above stages are executed, then *sehu* directly entered into the main scene that is playing the story.

7. Closing Scene

a. *Pa Shia Sin Bing*

In the closing scenes, *sehu* will reissue Book Ing character who was originally used to open the story. Then the character will utter the words of farewell to the audience to meet again in the next show. If the puppet show is held in pagoda, it will be announced the plays on tomorrow night which is a continuation of the play that has just been staged. If that day is the last day, while the story has not yet finished, then *sehu* should mention that on another occasion will be met again.

b. *Pa Shia Di*

After the Book Ing character did respect three times, there is a pair of young puppet like a new bride which appears on the show. It is a symbol of happiness. A pair of puppet is dressed in red, the man is on the left and the girl is on the right, then they do *soja* (respect) three times.

**The Influence of Indonesia's Historical Social Conditions on Tidal Shows of *Potehi* Puppet Theater in Java**

The distribution of cultural elements in *Potehi* puppet theater was due to the spread of emigrants from Hokkian who came to the north coast of Java, and they brought the art of *Potehi* show. At that time, Javanese society was a community that had culture as well. It meant that they were not in a condition which did not have culture (empty). As a result, there was an acculturation process no matter how slow the process took place. In the process of acculturation, there were creativity and improvisation of culture. Cultural creativity was a creativity which was said to be *the former characterizes creativity by way of its processes, the later by way of its products* (Hallam and

Ingold, 2007: 2). It can be interpreted that creativity of culture is actually a process as well as the result of a creativity. According to Ingold and Hallam (2007: 1-7), cultural improvisation contained four things: 1. generative which means cultivating forms of cultural phenomena throughout a balanced of acculturation life; 2. relational which means an intense and continuous relationship; 3. temporal which means being temporary and changing at any time; 4. improvisation which means one way of working in reflecting life. The existence of the creativity process and improvisation of culture appears in *Potehi* show. It can be seen from the use of low Malay (now Indonesian), the insertion of Javanese idioms, and Javanese songs. The process of adjustment to the situation in Java is seen in the form of *Potehi* stage. According to Hutcheon (2006: 200), the occurrence of adaptation related to economic, cultural, personal, and political factors. Adaptation is not only concerned with the transformation of intrinsic elements, but also extrinsic elements. In adaptation various parts of the elements of art (literature) are reformulated, adapted, and even eliminated. A performing art always reflects the social, cultural, and political background of the community where the show is alive. It can be seen in the adaptation of the *Potehi* show in Java, for example: many Hokkian speeches were missing or omitted because the later generations of *sehu* (especially of Javanese) did not master it any more. The political repression of that time also affected the Chinese descendants to reduce the role of the Hokkian language in the show.

The *Potehi* puppet of Chinese womb is a show part of their religious, religion, belief, and custom ceremonies. Throughout the history of womb Chinese ethnic in Indonesia, especially in Java, they have been involved in a socio-political struggle that has an effect on the continuation of the *Potehi* stage. Prohibitions in the New Order era for political reasons made the *Potehi* show undeveloped eventually. *Potehi* was only played inside the pagoda. As a result, the aesthetic problems of the show declined, due to the limited space.

*Potehi* observers and performers can not interact generously to *Potehi* and Chinese operators from their indigenous country, China. The disconnected relation with China caused the lack of knowledge transfer to the next generation. It happened because *sehumust* conquer Chinese opera song as one of requirements being a *sehu*. In addition, *Potehi* puppet theater showed degeneration in quality.

Political reasons decreased the womb Chinese's interest in *Potehi*. They did not want to bother dealing with government officials. They chose safety, so they did not involve in activities which were prohibited by the New Order government. Then some Javnese became *sehu* although they were Muslim. Consequently, there was an adaptation with local art, such as using *ludruk* songs or *ludrukparikan* (short traditional poetry) in the show of *Potehi*.

The dynamics of performing arts basically shows intercultural dialogue that results in the authenticity of cultural values. Culture is an ever-expanding dialectical process, in the process of tug-of-war and endless bargaining, a process of shaping was built using several elements that were closely related to politics, economics and others (Khayam, 1987: 118-120). It was seen in the form of *Potehi* shows and supporting devices, such as the stage. Some of the stage carvings made in Java have been adapted, even simplified by the *sehu* or puppeteer according to local conditions. It was triggered because many *sehu* were not rich, so the selection of stage materials became more economical and simple, like a stage of Gunawan *sehu* that was not made of teak wood, but from ordinary plywood without carving and simply painted. For them, the main thing was the show and not the stage.

## Conclusion

*Potehi* puppet theater lovers are not limited to the womb Chinese community, but also local tribes, such as Javanese. At present, the *Potehi* puppet theaters are mostly Javanese. It shows that *Potehi* puppet shows are Chinese intercultural bridges located in Java, such as Hokkian, Hakka, and Hokjia Hopek, and

also with Javanese, even other tribes outside Java. It is similar to Barongsay art that has penetrated into various tribes in Indonesia and played by various circles. *Potehi* shows are one of the most popular puppet shows and are the main contributors of the type of puppets in Indonesia. Communities in Java, Bali, Lombok, and parts of Kalimantan have the art of leather puppet and wooden puppets. However, none of the areas in Indonesia have hand puppet. Therefore, the presence of *Potehi* puppet that has been harmoniously adapted to other archipelago art forms increases the variety of Indonesian puppet that is in the form of hand puppet.

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