



ROYAL ACADEMY OF CAMBODIA  
ASIA RESEARCH CENTER

សន្និសីទអន្តរជាតិលើកទី១០ ស្តីពីតម្លៃវប្បធម៌អាស៊ីអាគ្នេយ៍

10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Southeast Asian Cultural Values

សហគមន៍នៃវាសនាតែមួយ

COMMUNITY OF DESTINY



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# RECONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE-JAVANESE SHADOW PUPPET THEATRE

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the reconstruction process of Chinese- Javanese shadow puppet theatre. This puppet is a form of cross-culture between Chinese puppet (potehi) and Javanese shadow puppet. The story is adapted from the comic *Sie Jin Kwi Tjeng Tang*, Chinese legenda during the reign of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

This puppet was created by Gan Thwan Sing in Yogyakarta in 1925. This puppet was popular and performed a lot at the pagoda and Chinese family between in 1925 to 1967. Since 1967, after all their puppet master (Gan Thwan Sing and his colleagues) passed away, and the presence of anti-China political events in Indonesia, this puppet was no longer being performed and just performed on October 6, 2014 in order to exhibit this puppet. Now, there are only two sets of this puppet, a set of it stored in Uberlingen Germany, and the other one in the State Museum Sonobudoyo, Yogyakarta.

It is very difficult to reconstruct the performance for it has not found a historical witnesses and lack of document audio and video performances. There are a few photos that can be observed and just a few gigs of data can be tracked. Based on the data and a little information about the shape of the performance, we have been successful in reconstructing the puppet performances. To support the performance, we use gamelan music “slendro tuning” by using the following three patterns of patet, namely patet nem, sanga, and manyura. This music has been successful in supporting the dramatic performance.

**Keywords:** gamelan music, shadow puppet theatre, Chinese-Javanese puppet

## Introduction

Wacinwa is abbreviation from *Wayang Cina Jawa* (Chinese – Javanese puppetry). It is a form of Chinese-Javanese acculturation. Chinese and Javanese are the ethnics which never stop interacting. Both of them fill and absorb each other and do not dismiss one from another. These ethnics are always side by side because they are different. For ages, both ethnics live together by bringing the cultural diversion. In the Javanese history, Chinese culture has been a part of Nusantara. In other words, the growth and the development of Chinese ethnic always follow to grow along with the changing in Java.

In Java, several kinds of puppet performance are known such as leather puppet, wooden puppet, mask dance puppet, and so on. In China, there was also a shadow puppet which is called as *Piyingxi*.



In Chinese history, shadow puppets theatre was very popular in the Song Dynasty (960-1278) just like in several provinces such as Sichuan, Shanxi, Shandong, Hunan, and Hubei. Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) were the golden era for the shadow puppets performance. However, since China has become Republic in 1911, the puppets performance is abandoned by the government. So, the birth of Chinese-Javanese shadow puppets was in fact to continue the art history of his nation and was combined with Javanese shadow puppets. So that, both were acculturated: to complement and to color each other.

### Discussion

*Wacinwa* was created by Gan Thwan Sing (1895 – 1967) in Yogyakarta in 1925. It was made by combining the Chinese and the Javanese culture. As far as concerned, there are only two sets of *Wacinwa* exist in the world. Both sets were initially collections of Chinese Institute, Yogyakarta. Today, one of them is kept in Uberlingen (Bodensee, Germany) owned by Dr. Walter Angst. Dr. F. Seltman bought it in the beginning of 1960s when he visited Yogyakarta. After he died in 1995, Dr. Walter Angst bought the puppet set.

The set of *Wacinwa* owned by Sonobudoyo Museum contains more than 200 figures and hundreds more of head characters. Now, the whole set has been replicated so it can be performed. Compared to the size of shadow puppet in general, the size of *Wacinwa* is relatively small. The biggest size is 68 cm in height, or only as big as a puppet played by children.

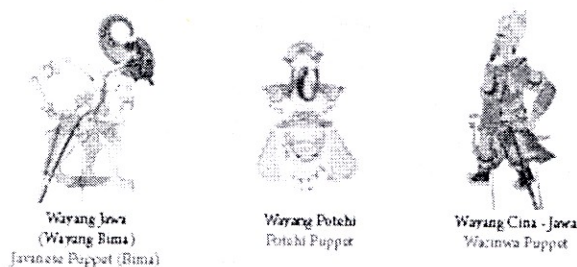
*Wacinwa* collection in Sonobudoyo Museum is unique. The puppet head can be change suiting the character for the act. The connector is placed in the neck or parallel to the shoulders. The end point of the connector is a bit loose so it spares a gap to attach the head. The head of a figure can be removed and replaced with another head. In this way, every act performed is done by changing the head of the figure as desired by the puppeteer. The figure can be the same but the head is changeable in different color but still in the same size.



Picture 1. One figure with several changeable heads

The iconographic of *Wacinwa* is interesting. It shows the expertise in designing various costumes with Chinese classic patterns. The beauty is seen from the ornamental variety and the coloring. Some ornaments on the costumes are Pat Kua, Lotus, Pagoda, Grouse Birds, Storks, Dragons, and so on, which are the variety of Chinese classic patterns. However, there is also an influence from Javanese ornament like the head of the Dragon which is similar to *Kala*.

The story delivered in *Wacinwa* is about the Sie Jin Kwie epic which is a heroic figure of the Chinese legend from Tang Dynasty (618-907 a.d.). *Wacinwa* in Sonobudoyo Museum is one that is created to tell the story of Sie Jin Kwi Ceng Tang. While the set in the Uberlingen Museum is to tell the story of Sie Jin Kwi Ceng See. Through this story, the Chinese people know that they can perform their ancestor identities. Through *Wacinwa*, there is an important value taken from the bond of those identities.

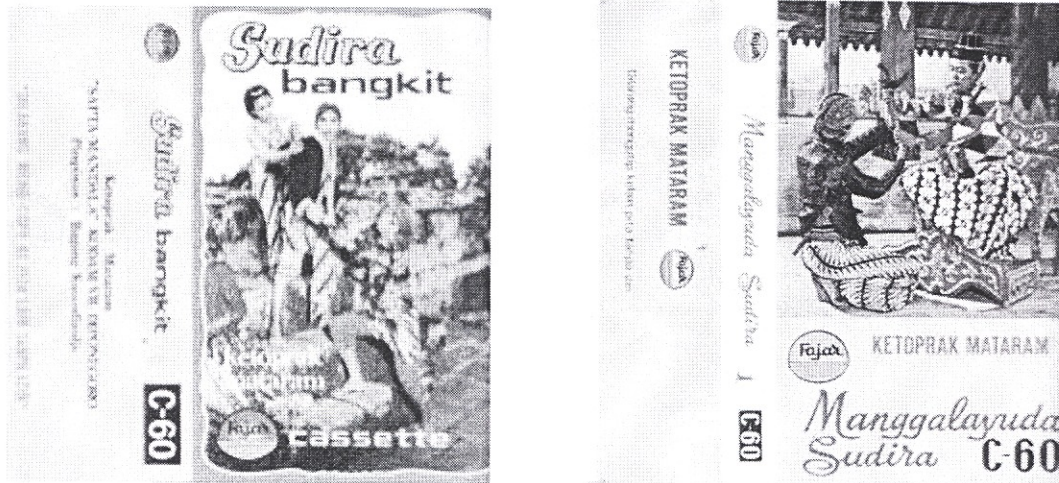


Picture 2. Javanese puppet (left), Potchi (centre) and Wacinwa puppet (right)

The Chinese-Japanese acculturation in *Wacinwa* can be seen in several aspects, such as in the puppet shape, the stage properties, and the performance itself. The puppet in *Wacinwa* is neither the Javanese puppet nor the Chinese Potchi puppet. The *Wacinwa* puppet is made of buffalo leather just like the Javanese puppet while the changeable head is an influence from Chinese Potchi puppet. The story is adapted from Chinese legend, while the way it is performed use the Javanese tradition in general which uses gamelan music and screen.

Since all *Wacinwa* puppeteers, who were Kho Thian Sing, R.M. Pardon, Megarsewu, Pawiro Buang, and Gan Thwan Sing died in 1967, this puppet had never been performed anymore. However, the spirit of *Wacinwa* was raised in other forms like *ketoprak* (traditional drama) and comic. The story of Sie Jin Kui, in Yogyakarta, was transformed into *ketoprak* by Mujiman Atmo Prayitno and staged by Ketoprak Saptamandala in 1970s by changing the characters name into Javanese name. Sie Jin Kui was known as Sudiro, Sie Teng San as Sutrisno, and Whan Lhe wa as Waryanti. At that time, there were several acts that appeared, for example, *Sudira Bangkit* (The Awakening of Sudira), *Manggalayuda Sudira* (The Hero of Sudira), *Sudiro Papa* (The Poor Sudira), *Sudira Ngumbara* (The Wandering of Sudira), and so on.





Picture 3. Cassette cover of Ketoprak (traditional drama) perform Sudira (Sie Jin Kui) episode

In 2001, the Story of Sie Jin Kui was staged through prizes ketoprak (traditional drama) and composed as the act of *Sang Senapati* (The Hero) whose presence was the television program audience’s favorite. The story of Sie Jin Kui was written again in serial scripts and staged by ketoprak RRI (the best ketoprak own by government) Yogyakarta in 25 episodes with the act entitled *Sudira Sukma Macan Putih* (The Sudira of White Tiger Spirit). The story was also played by Teater Koma (the best theater) in three acts known as Trilogy of Sie Jin Kwie (2010), *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah* (Sie Jin Kui detracted)(2011) and *Sie Jin Kwie di Negeri Sihir* (Sie Jin Kui in The Country Magic (2012).

In 1983, after the success of *ketoprak*, one Chinese descent painter, Siau Tik Kwie (Oto Suastika) made a comic telling the story of Sie Jin Kui. There were two versions of the story which are Sie Djin Koei Tjeng Tang (Sie Jin Kui Invades to the East) and Sie Djin Koei Tjeng See (Sie Jin Kui Invades to the West). The first story told about Sie Jin Kui’s struggle when he was expanding the colony to the East while the second story to the West (Korea).



Picture 4. Sie Djin Koei Tjeng Tang comic



Sie Jin Kui story is very popular in the area of Yogyakarta and the surrounding areas since the figure has a resemblance to the Javanese puppet figure, Bima, which is also popular in the Javanese community.

To perform *Wacinwa* is one of the processes to reawaken Chinese-Javanese shadow puppet which has been left behind for long enough. In the process to perform *Wacinwa*, there were some obstacles faced by researchers and puppeteer. One of them was in the identification the figures' name because there was no record provided to name each puppet figure. As our mutual concern, Gan Thwan Sing himself did not write the figures name and the former owner, Chinese Institute, did not provide the names either. So the first step done before to perform was to give the proper name to each puppet.

The naming to the figures had successfully done by a team consist of Danang Sujarwa (Museum Sonobudoyo staff), Dwi Woro Retno Mastuti and Sasrita Kanya Pramasvati (Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia) and Hanggar Budi Prasetya (Puppetry Department, Indonesia Institute of Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta). Giving a proper name to the puppet collection was not an easy task since there was no witness and inheritors who were knowledgeable about the puppet. As mentioned before, there was no successor for Gan Twan Sing and the puppeteers who were taught by Gan Twan Sing even died before him.

The first attempt done to properly name the figures was by comparing the puppets with the *Wacinwa* collections in Uberlingen, Germany. This attempt was not successful because the collection in Uberlingen, Germany is different from the collection in Sonobudoyo Museum. The collection Germany has more Javanese influence than the collection in Sonobudoyo Museum has. Besides, the collection in Sonobudoyo Museum was made for the story entitled Sie Jin Kui Ceng Tang, while the one in Germany was for Sie Jin Kui Ceng See.

Another way to identify the name was by observing and comparing the puppets iconography to those in the comic. This method, however, was not perfect because there are also unidentified figures in the comic.







Picture 5. Figures of Thia Kau Kim (left) and Sie Jin Kui (right) in the comic and the puppet

### **Synopsis of The Wandering of Sie Jin Kui**

Here is the synopsis the Wandering of Sie Jin Kui I adapted from Sie Jin Kui Tjeng Tang comic. This act have we performed as part of Wacinwa exhibition, 6<sup>th</sup> Oktober 2014.

Twelve months has been spent for Sie Jin Kui working for the Liu Wan Gwe's construction. When the winter is approaching, Sie Jin Kui is ordered to guard the material storage house. One afternoon, Princess Liu Kim Hoa, Liu Wan Gwe's daughter, and Ko Mama, her nanny, take a walk to see the beauty of building which is under construction. When Liu Kim Hoa walks near the Si Jin Kui's shack, there appears a white tiger that almost attacks them, but suddenly it disappears. The princess is curious about the tiger and takes a look into the shack and finds Sie Jin Kui who sleeps tightly in his shabby clothes. The princess feels pity about that and intends to give him proper clothes. At night, when Liu Kim Hoa tends to get the clothes for Sie Jin Kui suddenly the wind blows fast and extinguishes the lights. In the darkness, the princess unintentionally takes the heirloom clothes given by her father and puts them near to Si Jin Kui who sleeps soundly.

When Liu Wan Gwe gathers with his family, there is a servant who reports that Sie Jin Kui wears very nice clothes, too nice for a servant. Other servants accuse Sie Jin Kui for stealing them. Sie Jin Kui hides so that he will not be arrested. Liu Wan Gwe comes to Sie Jin Kui. He is surprised knowing that the clothes Sie Jin Kui wears are only given to his children and to his sons/daughters in law. Liu Wan Gwe does not believe Sie Jin Kui's words and intends to kill him instead. Sie Jin Kui escapes to avoid the problem

but Liu Wan Gwe cannot accept it and continues to investigate. Liu Wan Gwe holds another family gathering where each child must bring their heirloom clothes. Unfortunately, Liu Kim Hoa cannot find her clothes and show them to her father. Liu Wan Gwe accuses her for having an immoral and indecent affair with Si Jin Kui. He commands Liu Thai Hong (Liu Kim Hoa's brother) to execute Liu Kim Hoa.

Liu Thai Hong has no heart to punish his sister. When his father goes to see a visitor, Liu Thai Hong asks his sister and the nanny to leave the house. He gives some money for her journey. After Liu Kim Hoa leaves, Liu Thai Hong strategizes to deceive his father by throwing a big rock into a well as if his sister has done a suicide. Liu Wan Gwe believes that it really happens and decides to close the well.

Liu Kim Hua and Ko Mama walks away from home. They do not realize that Sie Jin Kui follows them from behind. Sie Jin Kui blames himself on what happens to them and just wants to make sure that Liu Kim Hoa will be safe during the journey. When Liu Kim Hua and Ko Mama take a rest in an empty house, Sie Jin Kui comes to them. Ko Mama approves them to get marry. So they get married witnessed by Ong Bo Seng, Sie Jin Kui's foster brother. One day, Sie Jin Kui goes hunting and meets his old mate, Ciu Ceng. After a long conversation, they decide to join the army. Ciu Ceng gives 300 tails to Sie Jin Kui who then comes home and hands the money to his wife. He asks a permission from his wife so that he can be a soldier. His wife agrees and together with Ciu Ceng, Sie Jin Kui applies in the army.

In Cong Hu Ge, there is an Emperor messenger whose name is Thio Su Kui who opens recruitment for soldiers. When he found Sie Jin Kui's name, he gets angry. He makes up that Sie Jin Kui's name is an insult for him. Thio Su Kui commands somebody to murder Sie Jin Kui. Being treated in such way, Sie Jin kui goes and delays his plan for being a soldier. He makes his way to home.

One day, a wealthy man Hoan Hong Hoai and his daughter walk home. In the way home, they are robbed by three robbers who are Kiang Hin Pun, Li Keng Hong, and Kiang Hin Pa. The robbers kidnap Hoan Hong Hoai's daughter. Hoan Hong Hoai feels a deep sadness but then he meets Sie Jin Kui. Full of tears, Hoan Hong Hoai tells about his situation to Sie Jin Kui. After that, Sie Jin Kui rushes to catch the robbers and gets into a fight with them. They are easily beaten by Sie Jin Kui. They even ask for forgiveness from Sie Jin Kui, but he is only willing to forgive if they agree to join in the army. They finally agree and Sie Jin Kui forgives them. Since Sie Jin Kui has saved his daughter, Hoan Hong Hoai intends to get his daughter marry to Sie Jin Kui. Because Hoan Hong Hoai forces Sie Jin Kui to marry her, he accepts it with a condition that the wedding should be held after he succeeds to become a soldier.

After Sie Jin Kui and the third robbers agree to join the army and vow to each other to become foster brothers, they walk together to Liong Bun Koan to apply as soldiers. Sie Jin Kui changes his name into Sie Le hoping that doing that will get him accepted in the army. Unfortunately, he is known as Sie Jin Kui. And for the second time, Thio Su Kui rejects him and chases him away. It is because Thio Su Kui knows that Sie Jin Kui is the one whom is dreamed as the savior by the Emperor. He does not want



anybody else having the same closeness to the Emperor just like him. Reluctantly, Sie Jin Kui leaves his foster brothers who have successfully joined the army.

In the way home, Sie Jin Kui is surprised by a horse rider who is being chased by a tiger. With his agility, Sie Jin Kui beats the tiger with his bare hands. In fact, the one who has been saved by him is Thia Kau Kim, a Commander who is in his way to deliver the logistic to the city. Thia Kau Kim sees Sie Jin Kui's bravery and gives him a recommendation letter. Then, there is no more reason for Thio Su Kui to reject Sie Jin Kui to become a soldier. But he still does not want the Emperor knows where Sie Jin Kui is so that he places Sie Jin Kui in the kitchen as a chef.

### **Closing: Reviving the Chinese-Javanese Shadow Puppet**

Chinese-Javanese shadow puppet (*Wacinwa*) performance gives an insight that in the past there was a distinct shadow puppet performance in Yogyakarta (Java). Even it was traditionally different from the original Javanese shadow puppets, it still embraced the guidelines in Javanese puppet although they were not fully applied. This concern is accepted since Chinese and Javanese traditions are basically different in some aspects. In the other words, *Wacinwa* does the cross-identity through the performing art and it reflects the acculturation between Chinese and Javanese cultures.

*Wacinwa* is no longer familiar to today's generation from both ethnics even though the process of acculturation itself has not stopped. It can be seen from other cultural products such as in culinary, films, works of literature, and so on. Thus, this performance is an attempt to open the social cognition shared in the past which involved the cultures of the Chinese and the Javanese ethnics through art.

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