

MOH ISA PRAMANA KOESOEMADINATA,  
SETIAWAN SABANA & NUNING DAMAYANTI ADISASMITO

## Socio-Historical and Cultural Influences on Visual Differentiation of *Wayang Kulit* of Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia: A Case Study of the Attributes Differentiation of Priest Drona Puppets

**ABSTRACT:** The “wayang kulit” (shadow play) is a traditional art of theatre that popular in Java and Bali, and considered as a multidimensional state of art which consists dimension of theatrical, literature, philosophy, moral education, and not to mention visual arts and crafts dimension as well, in which is the main discussion of this paper. There are several styles of Javanese “wayang kulit” based on their geographical area. Among those, Cirebon style possesses unique visualization which has resemblance to early phase of Islamic era “wayang” puppet. One of the character transformations done which includes personality and visual descriptions happened to the Priest Drona, the vital character of Mahabharata that role as “guru” (teacher) to both Pandawas and Kurawas, who was trapped inside dilemma between his warring disciples. In the adaptation version of Javanese shadow play, for some various and speculative reasons, Drona has been altered into an antagonistic character, and reached its extreme point of alteration as an absolute evil character in Cirebon version. Cirebon’s history, culture, and plural society gave significant influence on this. Drona puppets themselves have unique and specific visual attributes in comparison to other main characters puppets, and possess highly symbolic meaning beneath them. These facts told us that the character has a great significance. Later, these negative connotations of Drona was being sharpened and escalated in accordance of socio-historical events and local phenomenon, thus producing visual differentiation within the Drona puppets.

**KEY WORDS:** “Wayang kulit”, Drona character, Cirebon area, visual, differentiations, attributes, socio-historical events, and symbolic meaning.

### INTRODUCTION

In the early centuries of Christian calendar, Indian cultural-complex from Indian sub-continent spread to the Indonesian archipelago, making end of pre-historical period and later began the “historical period” or the Hindu era of Indonesian history, which is marked by the establishment of Hindu kingdoms. As a cultural-complex, Indian influence in Indonesia includes various cultural aspects such as Sanskrit language, Pallava writing system, Hinduism and Buddhism teachings and philosophy,

monarchial state system, hierarchal society system, arts, architecture, and others as well as the famous literature of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* epics. These epics are the teleological media of Hinduism philosophy, morality, and ethics teachings.

For the latter aspects, the epics took the local cultural approach like *wayang* (shadow play) theater form in order to be conveyed to the natives, since writing is still limited only to the noble families and elite society. The localization process includes the musical arrangements, symbolical philosophy, and the

---

Moh Isa Pramana Koesoemadinata, M.Sn. is a Student of Doctoral Program at the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology), Jalan Ganesha No.10, Tamansari, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. Prof. Dr. Setiawan Sabana and Dr. Nuning Damayanti Adisasmito are Lecturers at the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design ITB. Corresponding author is: [dronacarya@yahoo.co.id](mailto:dronacarya@yahoo.co.id)

depicting illustration of the characters. *Wayang* theater itself was Indonesian origin, predates the Hindu period much longer, well flourished in Java and Bali.

*Wayang kulit* puppets are two dimensional figures carved out from buffalo's hide (*wayang* refers to shadow, and *kulit* means leather, skin, or hide); and hold by gripping rods made from buffalo's horn. *Wayang kulit* is displayed as shadows on a screen by a puppeteer (*dalang*), who narrates the stories accompanied by singing and by the Javanese percussion music *gamelan* during the show. Although originally the puppets are to be viewed as shadows at the shows, they are also painted in full colors.

The localization as part of acculturation process of the epics never stops then. History writes that kingdoms rose and fell, Hinduism declined and Islam emerged as new dominant power in the region. *Wayang* theater was still being nurtured, developed, and patronized by the ruling power. Adaptation and actualization still take place, in order to be used to spread Islamic preaching then.

What we know about the *wayang kulit* puppet's look now was begun from Islamic period in Java. The visual form of *wayang kulit* puppet experienced shifting, alterations, and transformations in accordance with the successions of the ruling power in Java, since the fall of Majapahit empire, the foundation of early Islamic states in Java such as Demak and Cirebon sultanates in the last quarter of 15<sup>th</sup> century, then Pajang, the arrival of European traders and conquests, the rise of Mataram Islamic sultanates, the Dutch colonialism, and the divide of Yogyakarta and Surakarta in Central Java in mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was Dutch colonial intervention.

As the result, the Javanese *wayang kulit* puppet style has proliferated into several visual local styles such as Eastern Java style; Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Banyumas, and Kedu in Central Java; and Cirebon and Betawi style in Western area of Java. Although in basic level they all share and retain the same visual system, but each local style has its own

uniqueness in interpreting certain character. Until now, the process still takes place and never ceased in order to serve certain purposes.

*Wayang kulit* was patronized by the old Javanese kings and nobility, and the art developed within the wall of courthouses. These courthouses then become the cultural centers of the Javanese traditional arts, including *wayang kulit*. However, *wayang kulit* has also developed outside the courthouses, as folk's art. The centers of *wayang kulit* art are the courthouses in Surakarta and Yogyakarta in Central Java, and the courthouses in Cirebon in West Java. It is from these centers that the *wayang kulit* art has diversified into distinctive styles. That's why in 2003, *wayang* was been recognized by the UNESCO (United Nations for Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) as "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity".

And the example we took in this paper here is the visualization of Priest Drona puppet of Cirebon in West Java. The Cirebon style of *wayang kulit* puppet is being chosen as the discussion matter because of several considerations. Judging by its visual appearance, Cirebon style belong to the early phase of Islamic period, the visual transition between pre-Islamic *wayang* puppet (in assumption mimic to Balinese puppet) and the latest and most refined Surakarta style in Central Java. With this archaic looks, Cirebon puppet tends to inspire other style of puppet, even Surakarta style nowadays (Angst, 2007:224; and Pramana Koesoemadinata, 2007a and 2007b:187). Ironically, the reality is the Cirebon style of *wayang kulit* puppet hasn't been researched that much, and still considered as "terra incognita" along other Cirebon traditional arts in academic map (Cohen, 1997:35).

#### **THE CHARACTER OF PRIEST DRONA IN JAVANESE SHADOW PUPPET**

Drona is a controversial and complex character in the *Mahabharata* epic. He has a significant role as *guru* (teacher) to both

warring Pandawas and Kurawas warriors (Pendit, 1970:63-68 and 344-347; and Subramaniam, 2006:41-65). But in Javanese *wayang* versions, he was depicted as an ambiguous and mischievous yet humorous, with crippled physics (Anderson, 2000:34).

In Javanese shadow puppetry, there are controversies regarding Drona's role in the epic. Some people considered that Drona was actually a wise and virtuous sage that trapped into dilemma of choosing sides between his righteous disciples, the Pandawas, and other disciples, the Kurawas, who's fighting each other to win the throne of Hastinapura kingdom. Others considered that Drona is just a provocative culprit, a devious advisor, creating problems to gain his personal interests only. The latter is generally well accepted in the Cirebon puppetry (Rosidi, 1991:xxvii).

Drona was displayed with unique visual attributes such as distinguished "biological" anatomy, clothing, and accessories that made him instantly recognizable in comparisons to other puppets, even other *wayang* styles. The visual attributes strongly tied to how Drona's imagery and being described in Cirebon puppetry: devious, mischievous, cynical, and arrogant. The description is also has everything to do with socio-historical factors in Cirebon cultural area, in which this paper shall discuss furthermore.

Because of those considerations mentioned above, the characters of Drona from Cirebon *wayang kulit* puppet become the main studied object and thoroughly discussed here.

**On the Cirebon: Socio-Historical, Cultural Aspects, and Wayang Kulit Theatre.** Cirebon is part of the Java island and also part of Javanese culture. But the coastal geographic location enabled easy access to the outside world, so such intensive contacts with both



**Figure 1:**  
The Cirebon style of Priest Drona *wayang* puppet. In most Javanese puppetry, Drona was depicted as an ambiguous and mischievous yet humorous sage with crippled physics.

various foreign and other domestic cultures are inevitable. Since its foundation in the last quarter of 15<sup>th</sup> century, Cirebon had been an international trading center and also considered as a kind of melting pot of various kind of artistic, cultural, and religious activity. Intensive and continuous contacts have taken place with the Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Persians, Malays, and Europeans along with their cultures and their religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and also Western ideas. These have resulted into a certain kind of overlapping cultural blend, which is in accordance with the original name of Cirebon:

*Caruban* (Sunardjo, 1983). Accordingly, the resulting culture development is quite different in comparison to the inland parts of Java such as Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

Basically, Cirebon culture is also Javanese culture, which consist traditional arts like *wayang* play, mask dance, and many others. But those are not identical to the Mataram sultanate cultural base that is now inherited by Central Java, which has been claimed as the “true” Javanese. Cirebon has its own identity, its own kingdom, its own courthouses, and its own culture which is being constructed by its plurality through their own history (Budiono, 1986; and Kusnandar, 2012).

Once in Cirebon, *wayang kulit* arts were patronized by the feudal society. The developments take place within the walls of the courthouses. Under the leadership of Sunan Gunung Jati (1482-1528), Cirebon reached its zenith, brought the golden age of Cirebon (Hardjasaputra, 2011:55-85). Sunan Gunung Jati was also known as an Islamic preacher, one of the *Wali Sanga* (Nine Apostles) in Java island. So, there are Islamic values embedded on the products of Cirebon arts, as part of Islamic preaching, due to the cooperation with other *awliyas* (saints), especially Sunan Kalijaga of Central Java who was excel in traditional arts.

After that, Cirebon fall into decadence, being a vassal of Mataram sultanate of Central Java (1625), influenced heavily by Mataram’s cultural values, until the Dutch colonial took away their sovereignty, made them as sub-ordinate in 1703 (Lim & Gocher, 1990:20-23; and Hardjasaputra, 2011:87-129). As the result being Dutch colonial sub-ordinate, the feudal lost their power, autonomy, and authority left to control or influence the society, and the culture of the entire region, including the artistic activity of the people, leaving the people freely expressing within the parameter of tradition, which also tends to change.

Therefore, the folk’s puppetry has developed outside, beyond the courthouses patronage and guidance. The puppet’s visualization guides or rules become much loosened. They are developed by the common

people, instead by the nobility, and become the primary representation of the whole Cirebon puppet style. But, society is vulnerable to changes. History recorded countless changes occurred within the same society inside same geographical area. Rural folks tend to more adaptive to changes, especially when it relates to pragmatism, due to survival need on daily basis. These changes have certain effects on their art’s manifestations, shadow puppet for instance.

The influence of socio-historical change phenomenon gave effect on the visual aspect of the *wayang* puppet, whether it’s chiseled-based or painted-based features and attributes. Especially in the modern era, subsequent to the Dutch’s East Indies colonial era, empowered Western culture hegemony, as a result of the colonial ordinance to the social life of Cirebon locals. The influence enhanced to the next puppet visualization, at the era of independence (1940s), or the Republic of Indonesia (1950s), under New Order regime (1966-1998) to be precise. The people’s atmosphere tends to be denser in the next development of the visualization of *wayang kulit*.

However, this also supported by the character of coastal society, which tends to be expressive, dynamic, egalitarian in nature, enhanced by proletarian issues later, and relatively open minded to external influence.

***Relations between Wayang Kulit Theatre, Islam, and Javanese Society.*** Cirebon society consists of local ethnics (Javanese and Sundanese) who are dominant, and foreign ethnics (Chinese and Arabs), but the culture itself is Javanese. As a coastal area and harbor city, Cirebon is exposed to foreign influences intensively. Since its foundation in 15<sup>th</sup> century, Cirebon has been visited by merchants from the region and beyond. Many visitors like Arabs and Chinese travelers stay and settle down. Around the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Far Easterners citizens gain its peak in population in Cirebon, so the Dutch colonial put them to their own settlements (Van den Berg, 2010:95-110).

The Arab travelers mostly Muslims, originated from Hadramaut of Arabian peninsula, are considered by most of the local

inhabitants as descendants of Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him). Many of them are Islamic scholars, entitled *habib* or *sharif* with puritan tendencies. But some of the Arabs just pretend to be one in order to cheat the locals, which inspired the creation of Fez of Drona puppet type.

Many of Arabic ulemas, puritans, showed their disagreement on local arts and traditions that considered as *shirk* (belief in more than one God or polytheism), because of the "pre-Islamic" continuity by appearance. These perceptions of those *puritans* often offend the local art practitioners. They believed that every local and traditional form of arts in Cirebon is inheritance from the semi-legendary of *Wali Sanga* or Nine Apostles (*Awliyas* or Islamic saints), as the part of Islamic preaching media.

It is not a strange fact that the Cirebonese shadow puppet play has been claimed by the local art performers has Islamic in nature. Historically, Cirebon was the second Islamic kingdom in Java Island, which also served as the primary base of the Islamic mission in the west part of Java. All native arts and cultural products – which contained certain teachings of the previous religions and beliefs – were being adopted and used as Islamic preaching media, including the shadow puppet play.

The kind of Islamic teachings that have been foretold through the shadow puppet play is Islamic mysticism or sufism – which is embraced by Sunan Kalijaga of Central Java, who is considered as a semi-legendary "patron saint" of Javanese traditional arts, including *wayang*. Along with the three other traditional performing arts, the *wayang* shadow puppet play has a symbolic part which represents certain level of mystical hierarchy of Islam. Syncretism between Islamic teaching and the previous religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and also local animistic beliefs occurred here in Cirebon. Syncretism was possible because of the nature of the Islamic kind of teaching, sufism, which holds the harmony among plural society dearly and perceive the equal essence within all religions.

The "original" purpose of the present Cirebon *wayang* shadow puppet play is still intact: an Islamic preaching media, the entrustment legacy from the *Wali Sanga* (Nine Islamic Saints in Java), by looking most of the play's themes. These Islamic elements are sometimes also shown within the visual aspect of the puppets, such as ornamental details and others. This tendency of practicing Islam mentioned above then shaped the socio-cultural aspect of Javanese society (Djajasoebrata, 1999).

According to Clifford Geertz (1989), the Javanese society can be classified into three-chotomies of *Santri* (strict adherent of Islam), *Priyayi* (one belonging to upper classes in Javanese society), and *Abangan* (one who does not adhere strictly to the precepts of one's nominal religion) categories. There's a potential friction between *Santri* and *Abangan* in Javanese society. *Santri* whose represent devout Muslims and puritan, small, and middle class; *Abangan* whose represent majority, peasants, rural, and low class. *Santris* tend to be "Arabish" and tend to disagree upon the local traditions; and on the contrast, the *Abangans* keep distance to whole Islamic rituals (even they were Muslims too) and still practice their animistic rituals (Ricklefs, 2006:35-55).

The most interesting is the scene when Drona was confronted by *Panakawan* (clown-servant) characters, and suffers defeat and humiliation. Neither kings nor nobility these *Panakawan* were, just some lowly and humble comical servants of the nobility characters who dwells in poverty. They represent peasants, villagers, low-class subjects, and rural folks. But the *Panakawan* dared to be so disrespectful to most honored *guru* of the heroes and kings of *wayang* world.

The *Panakawan* clown-servants are not originated in India like Drona or the protagonists Pandawa, the antagonists Kurawa, and most characters in the *wayang kulit* which are based on *Mahabharata* epic, but they were created in Java, by Javanese ancestors. Many believed that the existence of *Panakawan* even predates the arrival of Hinduism in Indonesia archipelago.

Although having funny and ugly appearances and described humorous, using daily and commoners words for dialogues instead court-style, the *Panakawans* always depicted stood in righteousness, even in comparisons with the protagonist heroes or gods themselves. They constantly remind the protagonist heroes when they were misguided or being cheated by Drona. Because of their humorous and cheerful nature, the *Panakawans* are often being the main reason why the audiences watch the play. They are lovable by the people and the performers too.

It seems that not by coincidence if Drona can be assumed as the symbol of *Santri*; and on the other hand, the *Panakawan* as the symbol of *Abangan* in Javanese society context. Also, the puppeteers tend to affiliate themselves with the *Abangans*.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH**

The significance of this research is to reveal that the massive variety of Drona puppets of Cirebon *wayang kulit*, which are the result of visual differentiation, showing us there are also multi-interpretation upon the character. Particular visualization of attributes which include anatomy, clothing, and accessories of a *wayang* puppet has also particular meaning conveyed there. Different variations tend to mean differently.

The other is to enrich and to complete the knowledge and our understanding about Javanese *wayang kulit* arts. Most of known literatures are still focusing on Central Java style as the primary representative of Javanese *wayang kulit*. In the contemporary discourse of arts and culture, minor details or “small matters” are too fascinating to be avoided. And it’s also significant to confirm that most of art works and crafts made, including *wayang kulit* arts, contain reflections of some thought and socio-cultural understanding which are influenced by the changes of time or the course of history.

This paper is based on a dissertation research, and only a few parts of it will be presented here. The object studied here is the visual aspect or attributes of *wayang kulit*

artifacts. It is a qualitative research, using the socio-historical and cultural perspectives as approaches and settings. This kind of research is considered suitable for researches related to art and cultural texts. It also has to do with the interpretations of collected data.

The paper shall analyze the visual aspects of several elected Drona puppet artifacts as samples, which belong to courthouses, puppeteers, craftsmen, and collectors. Those artifact samples are being compared to each others, in order to study the visual differentiations among them. Only two samples will be presented here, due the limitation of space availability, and by considerations that these two represent the latest differentiation of Drona puppets, possess highly symbolic meanings and has interesting matter to be discussed.

Those Drona puppet’s artifacts are: (1) Fez Drona type, painted in KORPRI, *Korps Pegawai Republik Indonesia* or Civil Servant Corps of the Republic of Indonesia’s uniform, collection of the female puppeteer Mimi Tarul of Pagempuan, Cirebon; and (2) Naked Drona type, collection of puppeteer Mansyur of Gegesik, Cirebon.

The visual aspect of *wayang kulit* puppets consists of several elements, features, or attributes such as “biological” anatomy, clothing, and accessories. Neither clothing nor accessories “worn” by Drona puppet here are real. They are just imagery, built on particular and specific combination of chisel and paint elements that built a *wayang* puppet in total. But the anatomy, clothing, and accessories of a *wayang* puppet are vital attributes, as the signs of characterization, its role, and status.

By looking the anatomy, we can classify what kind of character is the *wayang* puppet, is it gentle or subtle character, strong, or harsh kind. Then it influences the movement and the vocal pitch which the puppeteer will use in show. By looking the clothing and accessories, we can recognize whether the character is a god, priest, king, warrior, or a servant. The visual aspects or the attributes being analyzed here are including clothing or costume, and accessories of the puppet, which are considered, possess certain significant meaning.

The anatomical parts will not be discussed here.

Several Drona puppets possess different type of clothes and accessories, in which we classify into several types. However, these features were not influencing his movement and voice in show or for theatrical purposes, but rather symbolize some thought that possibly a reflections of how the society, the *wayang* spectators see and perceive the character nowadays. One puppet type which shares the same attributes like same type of anatomy, clothing, and accessories also can be differentiated more by differentiating the paint elements. At this point, the variation of every puppet of Drona can be made unlimited.

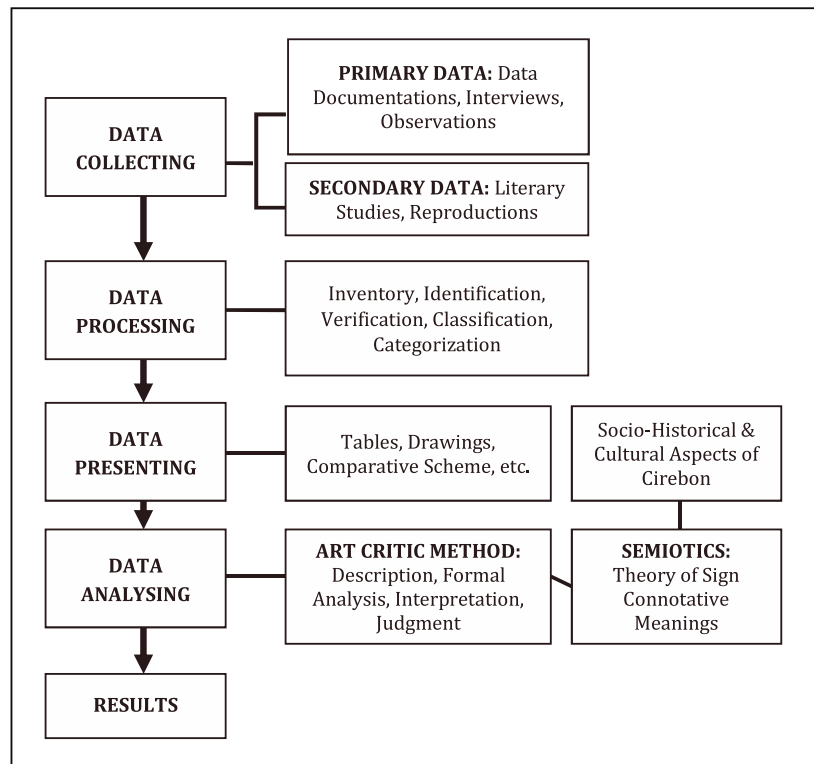
The methods here consist of several steps: data collecting, data processing, data presenting, and data analyzing. The data collecting methods produce two kinds of data: the primary data and the secondary data. The primary data is obtained by three kinds of methods: *first*, data documentation by taking pictures of the related artifacts, recording and taking notes; *second*, interviews with related sources such as the craftsmen, the puppeteers, and other informants with Cirebon related; and *third*, direct observations of the puppet productions by craftsmen, and the performances of the puppets during the shows. The secondary data is obtained by some literary studies, and reproductions of related pictures and photographs (see figure 2).

The data processing methods are conducted on the collected data from the previous stage. The goal is to select artifacts which are considered representative samples. The steps begin with the inventory,

identification, verification, classification, and categorization. Each step narrows and reduces all of the available data into sorted, selected, and focused artifact data. The data presenting methods are conducted in order to simplify the information gathered, by presenting them in various ways and forms, depend to what purpose they will serve: tabulation, drawings, graphics, schemes, etc.

There are some analyzing methods performed in this research, but due to the limitation of the discussion matter, only one method will be mentioned here. The “Art Critic” methods, which have been modified to serve the main purpose of the analysis, due the appropriation for Javanese puppetry convention and Cirebon culture context. The methods begin with descriptions, formal analysis, interpretation, and judgments (Feldman, 1967:468-480).

By using and modifying Art Critic methods, this paper will describe which ones are the



**Figure 2:**  
A Diagram Shows the Stages of Research Methods

differentiated visual attributes, and explain how the leather puppet's visualization can signify or addresses certain meanings that have correlation with the socio-historical and socio-cultural factors surrounding the artists, performers, craftsmen, and spectators of the Cirebon *wayang kulit* theatre. The result will be emerged as the outcome of the data analyzing step, discussed in the conclusions.

Arnold Hauser's *Sociology of Art* theory being used here as reference, because the nature of *wayang kulit* as a form of Javanese traditional art or ethnic arts. Art reflects society, more or less, so said Arnold Hauser in his theory, the *Sociology of Arts* (Hauser, 1982:90). This is definitely true concerning traditional arts and folk-arts, unlike Modern Arts, which are truly direct reflection of their surrounding society. But it's also related to certain generations in particular time.

The tendencies of traditional arts are collective, almost without individual expressions, following rigidly to certain pattern or guidance that being inherited by the predecessors, as well as sacred in nature. The traditional art, or ethnic arts, is the reflection of the society's ideology. In reality, there's no clarification about who is precisely responsible for creating, no records only gossips and rumors, yet had to be considered. So, art as the product of the society will be acceptable here.

Originally, some folk-art imitated feudal art, *wayang kulit* for example, but due to their effort to do so, aesthetic values tend to shifted. This was because of the lack of aesthetical understanding, lack of education, misguiding, and so on. The differentiation of aesthetic values took place here. "*Folk-art takes great examples of high arts, sings them to pieces, breaks them up, or simplifies them*" (Hauser, 1982:563). Arts became more "graphic" and explicit, loose their subtleness yet easily understood by majority. Feudal arts became "democratized".

## DISCUSSIONS

***Artifacts Analyze and Interpretations.***  
The earliest type of Drona puppet known –

judging by the accessories worn – is the "Ancient Drona" type that much resembles its counterpart in Central and Eastern Java. This type does still exist in limited numbers of hands in Cirebon. The courthouses of *Kasepuhan* (oldest) and *Kanomani* (newest) of Cirebon still have them in their sacred collections. The emergence of this puppet type depends on the foundation of each courthouse, because usually sacred collection of a courthouse was believed predates the courthouse itself, made directly since the *Wali Sanga* or Nine Apostles era (Guritno & Pandam, 1989; and KPSB, 2003).

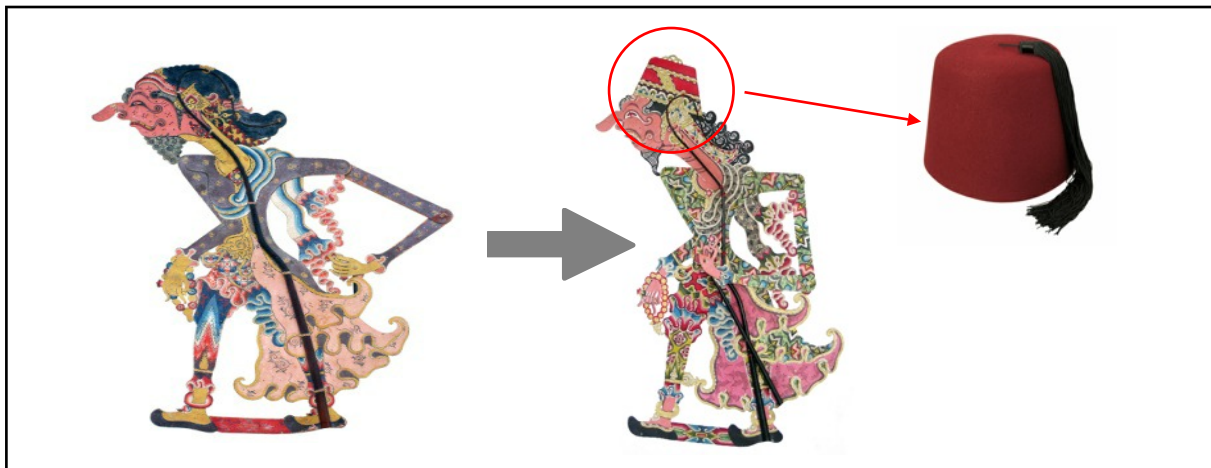
The royal courthouse of *Kasepuhan* was the oldest, built on 1678, so the assumption is "Ancient Drona" puppet type appeared then, or perhaps older. A very few puppeteers and collectors also have it too. But in majority, this type is considered rare in Cirebon, even nowadays, this puppet type never being used again in the play.

As a priest in the *wayang* world, Drona is one of very few that doesn't wear *turban*. *Turban* is a common accessory worn by priests in *wayang kulit*, besides praying beads and shawl. There were no specific meanings, but as status identification only. Drona also described having crippled left arm, so this is being manifested by creating only one arm (rear arm) that has articulation. The front arm are made one with the body, without any articulation at all, displays holding prayers beads, the usual accessory and sign of priesthood. This attributes made Drona as the unique puppet in *wayang* world (Purjadi, 2007).

But due to the repertoires in the shadow play theater which told the public about the mischievousness of Drona, all of those features or attributes bring negative connotations of this character. "Strange" or "alien", "disfigured", "cunning", "mischievous" are the connotative words fit enough to describe impressions of *wayang* spectators when they see Drona.

Later, the next visual differentiation as the development of *wayang* puppet took place within the people's hand, since the





**Figure 3:**

The original Drona puppet or “Ancient Drona” type (left), which is considered rare now in Cirebon. The “Fez Drona” puppet type (middle) which now replacing “Ancient Drona” as the main representative of Drona puppet in Cirebon style of *wayang kulit*. Notice: the fez being added on the head, compared with the real fez (right).

courthouses act as museums, only to retain arts, traditions, and culture as the way they are. And then, in the following events, those bad connotations of Drona being enhanced and sharpened further more.

Around first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the new type of Drona puppet was being created. There is a new attribute being added, a head accessory, a red fez-like one. This type what we called “Fez Drona”, that actually inspired by a local “historical” event took place in northern area of Cirebon. Either puppeteer Maruna or puppeteer Arma (interview with them, 2/10/2012 and 9/10/2012), both were famous *wayang* performers of Northern Cirebon, one of them responsible for Fez Drona type creation and supposedly inspired by that event (see figure 3).

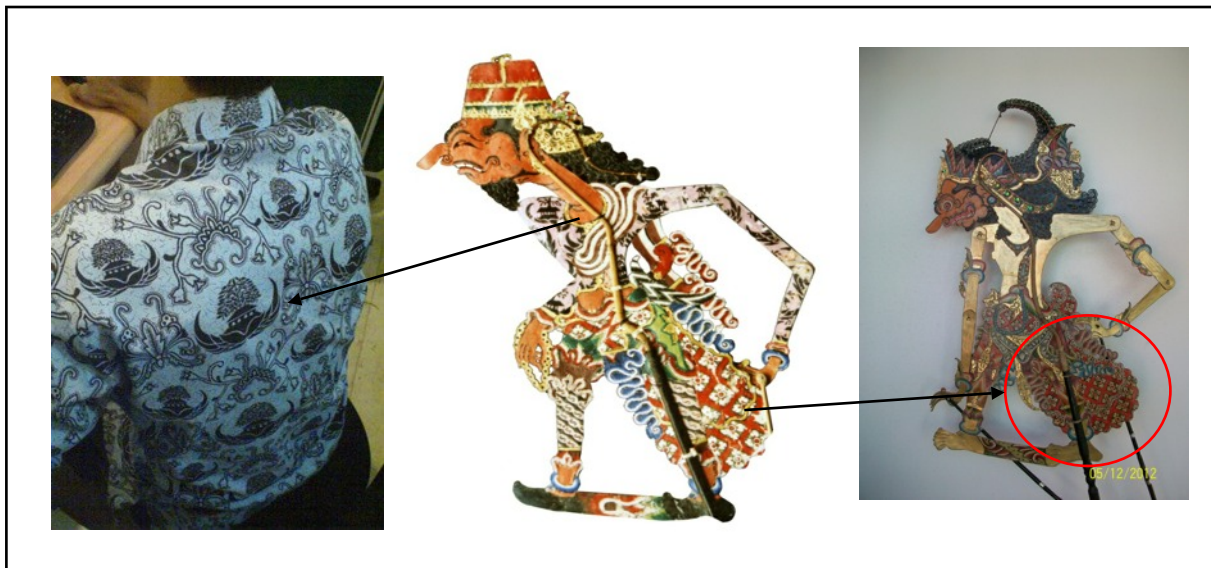
There was an Arab reside in Northern area of Cirebon, his profession was a loan shark. He lent money with high interest to the locals to gain profit. Sometimes, he acted as an *Ulama* (Muslim cleric) and showed his disagreement on local arts and traditions that considered as *shirk* (belief in more than one God or polytheism).

Of course, this ill-behaved Arab spread hatred among the local art practitioners (Cohen, 1997:107-110 and 224-252). This is because the local art practitioners, including

puppeteers, believed that every local and traditional form of arts in Cirebon is inheritance from the semi-legendary *Wali Sanga* (Nine Apostles) and *Awliyas* (Islamic saints), as the part of Islamic preaching media, especially *Wayang Kulit* theatre (Simuh, 1995). At that time, most of male Middle Easterners worn red fez as hat, and this accessory being a representative, applied into the newly created Drona puppet as a head accessory. Some practitioners give this “red fez” a symbolical meaning as the courage to seek troubles to others (Damayanti Adisasmito *et al.*, 2007:109-110 and 135-136).

Not only to immortalize the hatred of the local puppeteer against the Arabian loan shark, but furthermore, the Fez Drona puppet type was created as a tribute and constant reminder of the danger of foreign “priests” who uses his “religious authority” to suppress the low-class society, the rural people, and the local inhabitants for their personal gain. Since then, this Fez type was commonly used in performance until now, replacing the “Ancient Drona” puppet type as the main or standard Drona puppet. In fact, the Fez type became the main representative of Cirebon style of Drona.

The Fez type differentiated again. This time, during the regime of New Order (1966-1998) under the second President of Indonesia,



**Figure 4:**

The “Fez-Gembolan Drona” type belonged to female puppeteer Mimi Tarul of Pagempuan (middle). Notice: the additional *Batik* pattern painted on cloth which imitate KORPRI uniform (left), and the “*Kain Gembolan*” cloth worn that also worn by *Ponggawa* (bold warrior) puppet type (right).

Soeharto, the visual differentiation took place. This is the birth of Fez-Gembolan Drona puppet type. The visual elements being added now is “*kain gembolan*” (piece of cloth for carrying something) and *Keris* accessory. Usually “*kain gembolan*” cloth used by *Ponggawa* (court official)-type of *wayang* puppet, which represents bold warrior character, a fighter type, or military like. This does make sense, referring to the story that told us that Drona was the teacher specialized in the arts of war (see figure 4). In Javanese tradition, *Keris* is brought by Javanese officials as accessory to attend ceremonies or other formal occasions in courthouse, along with fez-like “*kuluk*” as head accessory.

Within this Fez-Gembolan type, there is an individual puppet which add paint element, a particular *batik* pattern on the clothing which in reality belong to civil servant or KORPRI (*Korps Pegawai Negeri Republik Indonesia* or Civil Servant Corps of the Republic of Indonesia). As a sign, this KORPRI *batik* pattern, which reminds Indonesians of civil servants, gives connotation of corruption, collusion, and nepotism tendencies. Another addition is the *Parang batik* pattern on the

Drona’s trousers. Clothes embedded with *Parang batik* type usually worn by Javanese nobles. The connotation of nobilities is feudalism and arrogance. This collection belongs to the late female puppeteer Mimi Tarul of Pagempuan, Cirebon.

Drona’s visual attributes were made being over complete and so luxurious, yet symbolical actually by combining all elements that signify power, wealth, over religious order (prayers beads), foreign attributes (fez), civil servant (KORPRI *batik* pattern), feudalistic ornament (*Keris* and *Parang batik* pattern), military control (*gembolan* cloth), and so on. This refers to satirical intention, criticizing the domination of military party in Indonesian government, corrupt, nepotism and such feudalistic tendencies, in accordance with the reality in the time of New Order regime (1966-1998). Drona now portrayed as a symbol of corrupt political power, military, feudalism, foreign, and religion as well, all of them fused together.

The last sample is Naked Drona puppet type. The name does speak for itself. Puppeteer Basari of Northern Cirebon was the first one known to display this type of puppet

on performance around 1970's. The puppet was used in certain scenes, like when Drona's plot failed and he was going to flee, suddenly the *Panakawans* (servants of royalty in *wayang* world) caught him, and deliberately stripped his entire clothes. All of the attributes that signify his highly status are being stripped off leaving him in loincloth only and Drona was just being helpless crying for mercy. Of course, this scene only exists in play made by the puppeteer himself, not referring to the original canon of *Mahabharata* (see figure 5).

The purpose of the scene is to ensure the satisfaction of the spectators, that the culprit of the story – Drona – has been punished for his mischievous deeds. The Drona role which is sinister and despicable has been successfully played by the puppeteer to provoke anger of the spectators. And the specific puppet, the Naked Drona was created to serve that purpose. This puppet type embodies the further hatred towards the character, the compensation through humiliation upon Drona. The hatred exploded, from a mere satire drastically shifted becomes a humiliating expression, a vulgar one, as were there no more manners left dealing with this kind of despicable character.

**Technology and Media Influences on Wayang Kulit Arts.** Pragmatism plays significant role here, due to the modern lifestyle that prioritize money before else, even sacred traditions, and traditional arts performers and craftsmen cannot deny or avoid it. Economy becomes crucial matter now, more than spiritual aspects. Despite its origin which was sacred, traditional performance art nowadays is about entertaining society, during social events. They perform within the expectation of the spectators, so they feel pleased, and the performers earn reputation



**Figure 5:**  
The "Naked Drona" puppet type, belongs to Puppeteer Mansyur of Gegesik, Northern Cirebon.

as well as fortune. They will be needed and hired again to perform the play as long as the spectators feel entertained and satisfied.

The contemporary social and political issues – local or national – give much inspiration to the world of puppetry, the play and including puppet visualizations as well. Satirical tendencies manifested within the puppet visualizations, responding political issues that has been broadcasted by modern media such as television or radio. These "hot" social and political issues are preferred themes by the public, so the puppeteers create a play using the existed *wayang* character that satirically symbolized those. And in addition, they also told craftsmen to create special puppets to accommodate the play (Holt, 2000).

The development of information media and technology, and their massive distribution

through sub-urban and rural areas, make information easily accessible by Cirebon *wayang kulit* performers that mostly reside in rural areas. However, this was different back then, when the *wayang* performers knew nothing about national issues, and their knowledge limited by their local resident only, due to the lack of education also.

Democracy atmosphere in Indonesia nowadays, successfully creating egalitarianism in social attitude, freedom of expressions, including “individualism”, being free to express any thoughts, feelings, including hatred towards anyone. All people now feels being equal to their predecessors and to upper class elites.

The other things that escalate the visual differentiation of *wayang kulit* puppets are the availability of new tools and media which bring more alternatives. The accessibility of modern paint, such as acrylic paint, drawing-pen, become primary option for *wayang kulit* craftsmen to choose tools and media. The craftsmen back then used traditional tools such as brush made from cat hair or goat hair, with natural dye made from bone powder, certain herbs, and finished it with fish oil coating (interview with *wayang kulit* craftsmen, 17/10/2012).

Due the difficulty of the process, and the lost of the knowledge, now they (craftsmen) just finish it with varnish, which easily obtained in hardware and paint store, and other from stationary stores (Hasyim, 2011:91-120). Also the rareness of buffalo’s horn made for gripping rods, become the issue here. There’s almost no craftsmen left in Cirebon area is able to make the proper gripping rods from horn; therefore, the horn being replaced by other material like rattan or fiberglass.

## CONCLUSION

The visual differentiation occurred as the result of new type of *wayang* puppet creation, Drona puppets for instance. The specific types of puppets are made in order to serve several purposes, such as: (1) Practical purposes, to serve theatrical needs like specific puppet for

specific scene; (2) Symbolism or implicit messages, that some visual attributes of the puppet are signs which readily convey certain meanings beneath them to the spectators, or certain messages were waited to be conveyed to the spectators through the mediation of certain visual attributes as signs; and (3) Aesthetical expressions as well as creative explorations within the perimeters of tradition, which are possibly based on the performers needs to demonstrate their craftsmen’s skill capabilities.

These purposes also heavily influenced by extra-aesthetical aspects, which surrounds the *wayang kulit* performers and craftsmen, like social and cultural aspects that are definitely vulnerable to the changes of time, history aspect as it. Especially the symbolism or implicit messages purposes in which this paper discusses more,<sup>1</sup> that were some kind of responses due the social issues happening at that time. Based on these premises, we would say that *wayang kulit*’s theater is far more than just traditional art and entertainment, but rather as symbolism, metaphors of Javanese socio-historical reality, which has took place in Cirebon in this case.

he visual differentiation as the development of *wayang kulit* of Cirebon appears more developed in the hand of folk people, and progressively by Northern Cirebon puppeteers and craftsmen. The majority of society tends to more innovative and adaptable due to the socio-cultural changes. Each puppeteers and craftsmen nowadays can express their individuality without any restriction besides the traditional conventions as perimeter, which has already relatively shifted.

<sup>1</sup>**Acknowledgement:** The first author (Moh Isa Pramana Koesoemadinata) would like to thanks so much to Dr. Pribadi Widodo, as a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Visual Arts & Design ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology) and as Co-Promotor II in the Doctoral Dissertation, for his guidance and supervision. And then, we gratefully also acknowledge to Haryadi Suadi, Rafan S. Hasyim, and Endo Suwanda for providing the data and information. We gratefully also acknowledge to Ki Purjadi, Ki Abihudaya, Eman Suherman, Emong Sukirman, Ki Eman Rukman, Ato Suhatno, Ki Nurrahsa, Ki Mulki, Mimi Ami Banowati, Elang Panji, Rastika, Sawiyah, Ki Mansyur, Ki Wigani, Ki Kurnadi, Ki Arja, Ki Kardama, Rama Sultan IX of Keraton Kacirebonan, and Sultan Sepuh XIV of Keraton Kasepuhan for their assistances and cooperations.

## References

- Anderson, Benedict R.O'G. (2000). *Mitologi dan Toleransi Orang Jawa*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Qalam, translation.
- Angst, Walter. (2007). *Wayang Indonesia: The Fantastic World of Indonesian Puppet Theatre*. Germany: Verlag Stadler.
- Budiono, Kuswa. (1986). "Rupa Wayang Kulit Cirebon". *Unpublished Undergraduated Academic Exercise*. Bandung: Studio Seni Patung, Jurusan Seni Murni FSRD-ITB [Faculty of Visual Arts & Design, Bandung Institute of Technology].
- Cohen, Matthew Isaac. (1997). "An Inheritance from the Friends of God: The Southern Shadow Puppet Theatre of West Java, Indonesia". *Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation*. USA: Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University.
- Damayanti Adisasmito, Nuning *et al.* (2007). "Estetika & Makna Simbolik pada Wayang Kulit Cirebon: Upaya Memperkaya Konsep Visual Seni Rupa Indonesia Masa Kini dan Masa Depan". *Unpublished Research Report*. Bandung: Faculty of Visual Arts & Design ITB [Bandung Institute of Technology].
- Djajasoebata, Alit. (1999). *Shadow Theatre in Java: The Puppets, Performance & Repertoire*. Amsterdam: The Pepin Press.
- Feldman, Edmund Burke. (1967). *Art as Image and Idea*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs.
- Geertz, Clifford. (1989). *Santri, Abangan, dan Priyayi*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, translation.
- Guritno, Haryono & Pandam. (1989). *Lordly Shades: Wayang Purwa Indonesia*. Jakarta: PT Jayakarta Agung Offset.
- Hardjasaputra, A. Sobana. (2011). *Cirebon dalam Lima Zaman: Abad ke-15 hingga Pertengahan Abad ke-20*. Bandung: Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Provinsi Jawa Barat.
- Hasyim, Rafan S. (2011). *Seni Tatah dan Sungging Wayang Kulit Cirebon: Pengantar Reka Visual dan Makna Simbolik*. Cirebon: Dinas Kebudayaan, Pariwisata, Pemuda dan Olahraga Kabupaten Cirebon.
- Hausser, Arnold. (1982). *The Sociology of Art*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Holt, Claire. (2000). *Melacak Jejak Perkembangan Seni di Indonesia*. Bandung: Penerbit Artline dan Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia, translation.
- Interview with puppeteer Arma, famous *wayang* performers of Northern Cirebon, on 9th October 2012.
- Interview with puppeteer Maruna, famous *wayang* performers of Northern Cirebon, on 2nd October 2012.
- Interview with *wayang kulit* craftsmen in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia, on 17th October 2012.
- KPSB [Kantor Pariwisata Seni & Budaya]. (2003). *Cerita Galur Wayang Kulit Purwa Cirebon, Bagian 1: Kasultanan Kanoman*. Cirebon: Kantor Pariwisata Seni dan Budaya Kabupaten Cirebon.
- Kusnandar, Dadang. (2012). *Cirebon Silang Budaya*. Yogyakarta: Gapura Publishing.com.
- Lim, Lawrence & Jill Gocher. (1990). "Cirebon" in *The Times Travel Library Singapore: Times Editions*. Singapore: Times Publishers.
- Pendit, Nyoman S. (1970). *Mahabharata: Pertempuran Hebat di Kurusetra*. Djakarta: Penerbit Bhratara.
- Pramana Koesoemadinata, Moh Isa. (2007a). "Tasawuf dan Perupaian pada Wayang Kulit Purwa Cirebon dan Surakarta". *Unpublished Magister (M.Sn.) Thesis*. Bandung: Postgraduate Program at the Faculty of Visual Arts & Design ITB [Bandung Institute of Technology].
- Pramana Koesoemadinata, Moh Isa. (2007b). "Unsur Tasawuf dalam Perupaian Wayang Kulit Purwa Cirebon dan Surakarta" in *ITB Journal of Visual Art and Design*, Vol.1, No.2 [August].
- Purjadi. (2007). *Pengetahuan Dasar Wayang Kulit Cirebon*. Cirebon: Badan Komunikasi Kebudayaan & Pariwisata Kabupaten Cirebon.
- Ricklefs, M.C. (2006). "The Birth of Abangan" available also in <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/btlv/article/viewFile/2/2> [accessed in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia: 14 April 2013].
- Rosidi, Ajip. (1991). *Rikmadenda Mencari Tuhan: Sebuah Lakon Wayang Carangan Ciptaan Dalang Abyor*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Simuh. (1995). *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Tasawuf Islam ke Mistik Jawa*. Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya.
- Subramaniam, Kamala. (2006). *Mahabharata*. Surabaya: Penerbit Paramita.
- Sunardjo, Unang. (1983). *Meninjau Sepintas Panggung Sejarah Pemerintahan Kerajaan Cirebon, 1479 - 1809*. Bandung: Penerbit Tarsito.
- Van den Berg, L.W.C. (2010). *Orang Arab di Nusantara*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu, translation.



**The Wayang Kulit of Cirebon**  
(Source: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), 17/9/2012)

The visual differentiation as the development of *wayang kulit* of Cirebon appears more developed in the hand of folk people, and progressively by Northern Cirebon puppeteers and craftsmen. The majority of society tends to more innovative and adaptable due to the socio-cultural changes. Each puppeteers and craftsmen nowadays can express their individuality without any restriction besides the traditional conventions as perimeter, which has already relatively shifted.