

Preservation of Local Wisdom: Reconstruction and Revitalization of Cecak Puppet from Riau Island

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Abstract: *Wayang Cecak* or lizard puppet is one kind of oral tradition which is almost critically abandoned because of lack of successors. Its maestros are no longer active nor alive. This puppet remains only in the memories of the people in Penyengat Island. To prevent this puppet from being completely forgotten, it is important to revive it through research, reconstruction, and revitalization of this puppet. This paper is intended to find a way of reviving *Wayang Cecak* within the collective memory of the people into a living tradition by means of literary study and field study through surveys, observations, and interviews. The finding shows that the last maestro of *Wayang Cecak* has been inactive since the 1940s. *Wayang Cecak* has a distinctive performing structure. To reconstruct the puppet show, traditional artists from Penyengat Island were involved in this project based on collective memory data. From the reconstruction, revitalization of *Wayang Cecak* was carried out through socialization and improvement of the performance. Revitalization was conducted by performing *Wayang Cecak* in Penyengat Island, the origin place of this performing art. It is expected that *Wayang Cecak* will be revived from its critical condition to a safer condition as a living tradition among the Malay community. Support from regional stakeholders, the Central Government, and the local community is needed to realize this purpose.

1 INTRODUCTION

Interest in the literary tradition of the *Wayang Cecak* began when Sanggar Lembayung participated in the Art Performance in Tanjung Pinang on November 17, 2012, by performing the fragments of King Haj Fisabilillah's struggle against the Dutch colonial. They performed the puppet made of cardboard. Why cardboard? Why not the famous puppet called *Wayang Cecak* that had become the icon of Penyengat Island in the past. Has it been completely forgotten? These questions found their answers in 2016 when the Center for Language Development and Preservation initiated a research program with *Wayang Cecak* as the object of study.

Early searches were carried out through literature study and collecting information from several cultural elites around Tanjung Pinang and the surrounding island. It turned out that *Wayang Cecak* had not been performed for a long time, and their active puppeteers were no longer found. Indeed, its artefacts are difficult to find. After the field study by interviewing several elderly people in Penyengat and Tanjung Pinang islands, there came a slight hope.

Resource person, most of whom were in their late 60s provided some informations. Those are people who have watched the *Wayang Cecak* performance.

This puppet show used puppet doll made of cloth. The show was set on a table with a small stage. In Malay oral literary tradition in Penyengat Island, the puppet show was also known as a traditional play. Their memories are the key to reconstruct and revitalize *Wayang Cecak* in the community.

Basically, the traditional puppet shows can be found in many ethnic groups in Indonesia, such as the Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese, the Sasak, and Malay. Malay people living all over the country have various kinds of *Wayang*, such as *Wayang Betawi*, *Wayang Palembang*, and *Wayang Banjar*. Those ethnic groups still maintain their puppets show and perform them in the local languages with their respective cultural backgrounds. This puppet tradition can be found in various types, ranging from *Wayang Orang*, *Wayang Beber*, *Wayang Kulit*, and *Wayang Golek*.

In addition to the four types of puppet show, there are also puppets resulted from acculturation between Javanese and Chinese cultures, also known

as *Wayang Potehi*. This kind of puppet show can be found in several regions, such as in Jakarta, Sukabumi, and Semarang (Mastuti, 204: 4). What about the *Wayang Cecak* in Riau Islands?

According to some sources, *Wayang Cecak* is also the result of acculturation between the Malay and the Chinese ethnic groups. This puppet has never been performed on stage again, and no more been the living tradition of the Malay people. The local community is no longer intact with *Wayang Cecak* show. After some tracking back, somehow, some traces of this *Wayang Cecak* can still be found, especially in Penyengat and Tanjungpinang islands. Moreover, the tradition of *Wayang Cecak* performance can still be tracked down in Daek Lingga.

There are several opinions about the origin of *Wayang Cecak*. This oral tradition is named *Wayang Cecak* because the puppets are made into small puppets like the wall lizards. This statement was taken from Azmi Mahmud the gazal player of Kampung Kambat. According to King Abdul Malik, the Malay people in Riau used to refer something tiny to the word *cecak* or wall lizard. The word is directly contrasted with the word *buaya* which refers to something big.

Different from Javanese or Sundanese *wayang* which originated in the Indian epic, the Mahabarata and the Ramayana, *Wayang Cecak* presents stories of typical Malay epics, such as *Syair Siti Zubaedah*, *Raja Haji Fi Sabilillah*, and *Syair Silindung Delima*. Those three stories are very well known among the Malay community. The recordings of this story are also documented in the ancient handwritten-manuscripts. No screen is needed to create a shadow for *Wayang Cecak*, and a small stage is used instead.

The condition of *Wayang Cecak* can now be considered as critical or even extinct because this kind of puppet show is no longer staged. This information was obtained from several cultural observers in the Riau islands. To revive this puppet show, the research was carried out through interviews with elderly people who witnessed the live puppet show.

The critical condition of *Wayang Cecak* has raised concerns amidst the latest effort of UNESCO to establish *wayang* as the world heritage from Indonesia in November 2003 (Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity). The recognition of UNESCO is an appreciation of Indonesian dignity to the world level. In connection with the award, Indonesian people should maintain the *Wayang* as their cultural heritage in the effort to revive the *Wayang* tradition as part of the living

traditions. The efforts are carried out not only by preserving the tradition, but also by developing *wayang* to continue living in the tradition, not merely in the memory of the elderly people who witnessed the *Wayang Cecak* show.

Related to the high appreciation of *wayang* and the efforts to develop it, it is appropriate that *Wayang Cecak* is revived and developed so that its existence can be known and its performance can be enjoyed again by the present generation.

The main problems in this paper are to show the current condition of the *Wayang Cecak* as part of the local traditions, to describe its performance, and to revive it as part of the living tradition of local people. The aim is to explore the existence of *Wayang Cecak* within the Malay community and to know the elements of the show and to revive it as an effort to improve the viability of *Wayang Cecak*.

Wayang Cecak, like other puppet shows, should have aesthetics and benefits. According to Yirtohadimidkoko (1987), the puppet show contains splendid philosophy and moral teachings. *Wayang* can be used as a means to refine human behavior and attitude. Refinement through aesthetic package in this puppet show is delivered through its narrative. Related to that, *Wayang Cecak* also has aesthetics and ethics that should be empowered. Such empowerment can be done through research tracing back its existence.

2 TRACING THE TRADITION OF *Wayang Cecak*

2.1 Memory Reminding and the Reconstruction

In the 1940s, a *Wayang Cecak* puppet show was played by a maestro, named Khatijah Terung, wife of Abu Muhammad Adnan. Thanks to Khadijah that made *Wayang Cecak* quite popular in its time. The puppets used in the performance are small-sized dolls made of cloth. It also reflects the influence of Chinese culture in the Malay community.

The existence of Chinese culture is inherent in the Malay tradition. Chinese people living in Senggarang Island—across Penyengat island—have a tradition of Chinese opera and puppet show. The proximity of those places allows for a blend of cultures. This can be proven by many Malay classical literature with Chinese nuances, such as *Syair Perkawinan Nak Kapitan*, *Syair Baba Tik Sing*, and *Syair Tan Tik Tjoe*. The existence of

Malay-Chinese literature was examined by Salmon (1985:30). According to him, in 1852 during the Netherlands Indies there were around 1165 Chinese residents aged 12 years and over. The closeness of the Chinese people and Malay ethnic group made them acculturated.

Basically, *Wayang Cecak* in the Riau islands was adapted from the Chinese puppet show. The interaction between Malay and Chinese cultures has been going on for a long time. Salmon (1985:30) quoted

"... ada satoe njonja Tionghoa dengan anak prampocannya, golongan orang baik-baik tapi miskin, jang biasa tjari penghiopenan dengan trima oepah menjanji dan mendongeng. Beberapa njonja biasa patoengan aken ondang itoe iboe dan anak di salah satoe roemah boeat dengerkan rame-rame marika poenja dongengan dan njanjian, jang biasanja diberikoetkan djoega dengan taboengan gambang ... Banjak njonja-njonja Tionghoa jang pande berpantoen lantaran soedah biasa denger wajang tjokek jang meramekan pesta-pesta jang mempoenjai stock besar dari segala machem pantoenan..." (Claudine Salmon, 1985:30)

"There was a Chinese woman with her daughter from a good but poor family. They earned their living by singing and story-telling. Some hostesses would collect some money to invite the mother and daughter to sing songs and narrate folklores in one of the houses. This occasion would be accompanied by gambang musical instrument.... Many Chinese mistresses could recite the poems because they had been familiar with the *Wayang Cecak* that was performed in big parties with a lot of poetry reading...." (Claudine Salmon, 1985:30)

Wayang Cecak as the product of aculturation existed in the past and was developed in the Riau regions, especially in Penyengat island. Even though *Wayang Cecak* is now no longer performed, its traces are still aparent in the public memory. The process of tracing back was conducted by intervieweing several live-show spectators. According to Mr. Ibrahim and Mr. Adenan from Daik Lingga (as conveyed by Yoan Sutrisna, 2016), the puppets were made of cloth. These dolls were small in size, about 7.8 inches or 20 cm. Cotton was inserted into the dolls to shape them in proportion. This puppet was played at night with a kerosene lamp and was played on a portable mini stage. This puppet show told well-known stories from the old Malay poems, such as *Siti Zubaidah*, *Selendang Delima*, and the story of *King Haj and the Chinese Captain*.

The information about the dolls made of cloth and stuffed with cotton was justified by Mrs. Zainab, wife of Raja Hamzah, the owner of the Indrasakti Foundation in Penyengat Island. The same information was affirmed by Mr. Ibrahim Jantan, a cultural observer of Penyengat island.

Another trail that deserves attention is the collection of around 50 puppets in the Setiadarma Mask House in Bali. The most interesting information of the puppet show tells that the puppet show was originated from the Hok Kian province in China with the name of *Wayang Kaet* or Mu Euw Shi. These puppets have become the collection of the Mask and Puppet House of Setiadarma, in Sukawati, Gianjar, since 2010. *Wayang Gaek* (Mu Euw Shi) performs folklores that are popular among Chinese descents living in Tanjungpinang, Riau Islands, and the surrounding areas. Those dolls were obtained from antique dealers. The question which follows is whether *Wayang Cecak* has something to do with *Wayang Kaet*.

The public memory of the *Wayang Cecak* was also traced through four different works that might have been inspired by *Wayang Cecak*, but with different performances. First, the theatrical puppet performance of Yoan Sutrisna (2013). This young artist works in cooperation with the Sabda Bunian community and Sanggar Lembayung to make a puppet show made of cardboard paper. The story played was taken from a fragment of "Raja Haji Fisabilillah against the Dutch colonial" at Tanjungpinang City Art Council.

Second, the dance "Lenggang Cecak" choreographed by Hasnizar Hood. This dance was played by 8 people with a duration of 10 minutes. This dance was performed at the Riau Island Art Council. Third, the "Senandung Perce" dance created by Azmi Mahmud. This performance was played by 10 young men. According to the choreographer, this dance was created based on his memory of the *Wayang Cecak*. The fourth, a novelet by Hasan Junus (2005) entitled "Pengantin Boneka" deicted clearly about the *Wayang Cecak* puppet show. The play played "Amuk si Biring Kuning," a Malay legend that tells about the origin of mermaids. This novelet becomes the most complete records of *Wayang Cecak*.

In this paper there are also some important things about the *dalang* or the puppeters. One of them is Salamah who lives in a small island (Referred to as Penyengat island). Her father became a widower after her mother passed away on the day when she was born. Her father gave her the name Salamah which means 'female carrier of peace.' Salamah's

husband is Mr. Muhammad, a government court official in Penyengat island. Her husband passed away in Mecca where he sought higher education.

Since childhood, Salamah was trained by her grandmother to make dolls. Salamah was also taught by her grandmother about *Wayang Cecak*. Every time she ended her puppet show, salamah always mimicked her grandmother's words. She has recited those words thousands times during her life.

One day a young man was introduced to Grandma Lamah (a common address for Nenek Salamah). He has been living for a few months on the island. He knows in details about *Wayang Cecak*, except for the twelfth story. After almost a year of practice, he officially performed the puppet show in the large living room of her house.

Salamah's mastery was handed down from Nenek Anjung, the old woman who had rigorously nursed her since childhood, ranging from all sorts of housework, courtesy, to memorizing the dialogue. There was supposed to be no mistake in the plots as well as the narration.

It was stated on a part of Hasan Junus's work that "Salamah was invited by the sultan to play *Wayang Cecak* in the royal palace in front of the Sultan's family, and it happened several times. Nevertheless, the twelfth episode of *Wayang Cecak* "Amuk si Biring Kuning" could not be finished because she got news from people that Nenek Anjung passed away. Other information about the stage performance of *Wayang Cecak*, "The old woman's voice was still clearly heard. The old woman was sitting in front of the copper mini stage." One by one she set the patchwork dolls in front of the stage.

"The drum and the trumpet sounded, soft at the beginning, then the sound became louder as they approached closer. All the puppets were lined up towards the door facing to the sea. And then Grandma walked down the stairs onto the calm water while leading all the puppet brides in twelve episodes of *Wayang Cecak*.

Other interesting information is stated that before the puppet show, there was a special ceremony. The ceremony was carried out by the Grandma. "Incense was burned, the mantra was spelled out by the grandmother with her trembling old voice. But how did she get the voice of a teenage girl when she began singing the prologue?

*Hidup ini seperti embun di daun
Seperti embun di atas daun
Embun di ujung daun...
Dan dalam embun Tuban
Mari mandikan diri
Cuci-cuci!"*

Life is like dew on leaves
like dew in the leaf's surface
dew on the tip of the leaf
and in the dew of Tuban
let's take care of yourself
do the washing up.

There are 12 episodes in *Wayang Cecak*, some of which are "Pengantin Duyung" (The Bride Mermaids), and "Si Biring-Biring Kuning." Yoan Sutrisna told that the story was taken from a manuscript with various versions, such as the story of Nak Kapiten, Raja Haji Fi Sabilillah, and "Syair Sitti Zubaedah."

The original text of the story is still stored in the Indrasakti foundation, chaired by Raja Hamzah. Now it was handed down to his son after the cultural observer died. The story of Raja Haji Fi Sabilillah is found in the Hikayat Negeri Johor. The manuscript of the Hikayat Baba Tik Sing is still well-kept in the National Library in Jakarta and in Leiden University library. The same thing applies to Syair Sitti Zubaedah which has been popular in Malay. This story tells about a brave woman who travelled to China (Al-Hamidi, without years).

The audience of this *wayang perca* or puppet cloth is children from the noble family, and it cannot be performed carelessly. In the work of Junus, there were about twenty women and children during the puppet show. All those audience were amazed by the show. They watched it and thought that it was real, and that they became parts of the story. The distance between the spectators and the stage is not too far because of the small-sized puppets.

2.2 Revitalization of *Wayang Cecak*

Based on the track record of *Wayang Cecak*, a puppet show was performed. This show is one of the efforts to revitalize it so that this puppet show will not extinct. This performance is expected to remind the people of Penyengat island about the *Wayang Cecak* performing art. The community together with the stakeholders must work hand in hand to revive the *Wayang Cecak* show, and to maintain it so that the puppet show will remain as part of the local tradition in the Malay land. Maintenance is important because when puppets are no longer exist, a lot of cultural teachings will be lost, too.

Revitalization and reconstruction of the *Wayang Cecak* were carried out by the team from the Center of Development and Protection, the Language Agency (Mu'jizah and Purwaningsih) in collaboration with relevant institutions, including Tanjungpinang City Tourism and Cultural Office

and the Riau Islands Provincial culture Office, and Mr. Azmi Mahmud supported by several artists and the adat elders of Penyengat Island. This collaboration has made the performance of *Wayang Cecak* possible and can be enjoyed by the Malay people in Penyengat and Tanjungpinang Islands. Mr. Azmi Mahmud and the traditional leaders on Penyengat Island were very proud if the tradition of *Wayang Cecak* can be performed again.

With various limitations, eventually the *Wayang Cecak* was performed by taking a fragment taken from "Syair Sitti Zubaedah." The performance lasted about 30 minutes on July 23, 2017 at 3:00 p.m. It was performed in the village hall of Penyengat Island together with the Penyengat Island Festival 2017. The second performance was held at Tanjungpinang City Center (TCC) on July 25, 2017, at 7:00 p.m.

During this premiere puppet show, small dolls were used, about 15 cm in size involving a total of 7 dolls based on the story of "Sitti Zubaedah." The stage was about 1.5 meters high with proper decoration based on the story. Sitti Zubaedah's story was composed into some dialogues which were adjusted to the number of characters in the story. The plot involved conflict and climax at the end of the story with careful scriptwriting. The process of composing the story was very important so that it became an interesting story for the audience. The accompanying music for this puppet show included the gongs, kompang, babanu, tambur, kecap, and violin. In the past, this kind of puppet shows was only accompanied by trumpet and tambourine.

The audience was curious about this show after its disappearance for almost 70 years. It was sold-out and all of them were very enthusiastic. They came from various backgrounds and age groups: parents, teenagers, and children. Many spectators sit down on the floor. Even both sides of the stages were full with audience. Even a lot of people sat on the guardrail of the mosque. The heat of the sun did not inhibit them from watching the *Wayang Cecak* show.

The second performance was staged at night on the Tanjungpinang City Center (TCC). The audience's enthusiasm could also be seen during this show. Many people who were shopping approached the stage and watched it till the end. This show could satisfy their curiosity on *Wayang Cecak*. The performance of "Sitti Zubaedah" puppet show was not a final and perfect performance. This show still searched for appropriate styles; therefore, some elements as parts of the show still need some improvement, in terms of stories, puppets, stages decoration, and accompanying music. People's

feedback was needed to improve the puppet show in the process of finding the perfect style of *Wayang Cecak*.

The show, which was presented by the Language Agency, in collaboration with the Penyengat Island Heritage Center, was expected to provoke people to revive the *Wayang Cecak* performance. People were asked to criticize this performance so that in the upcoming performance, there would be better performance. For the socialization of this activity, news of the puppet show was broadcast on several media, at RRI Tanjung Pinang and Fitcom TV. News were also broadcasted through *Riau Pos*.

The *Wayang Cecak* show is now starting to crawl back to life. This was also marked by the re-performance of the puppet show by Mr. Azmi Mahmud and his team in several shows, including the performance that tells the story of "Hang Tuah." This show was recorded and specifically reported in Kompas.com. With the redisplaying of *Wayang Cecak*, this traditional performing art is expected to return as part of the living tradition among local community.

3 CONCLUSION

Wayang Cecak as an oral tradition of Penyengat Island needs immediate attention to prevent it from being extinct. The disappearance of *Wayang Cecak* will also mean the loss of cultural teachings inherent in it. Intensive efforts are needed to dig and excavate it from the people's memory for the re-empowerment of the *Wayang Cecak* as an important part of the living tradition in Malay. Hopefully, *Wayang Cecak* will regain its popularity, and this condition can be achieved by the frequent performance of *Wayang Cecak* in the region.

Efforts to trace the existence of *Wayang Cecak* can be done in various ways, ranging from literature studies and field studies through interviews with elderly people who have watched it. Ideally, this effort of revitalizing *Wayang Cecak* will be supported by the community and the stakeholders in the local area where the tradition lives and survives. These reconstructed performance must be presented and repeated in various important events within the communities.

The *Wayang Cecak* show with the story of "Sitti Zubaedah" is not a final reconstruction. This performance must continue to improve and achieve the best performance that are close to the original. For this reason, the role of the community is needed

in giving their criticism regarding its story, puppet, stage, and music.

Hopefully, the effort of reconstructing *Wayang Cecak* performance is not the end activity. A series of revitalization program should be initiated to make this effort successful. One of the ways is through learning process, either formally or informally, or through non-formal trainings. Through these process, it is expected that the effort of revitalizing *Wayang Cecak* will be maximum.

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