

# Wayang Ajen:

## Cultural Media Diplomat Culture

Arthur Supardan Nalan\*  
 Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia (ISBI) Bandung  
 Bandung, Indonesia  
 \*arthur\_nalan@rocketmail.com

**Abstract**—*Wayang Ajen* is one of the Indonesian's contemporary puppets. More than 20 years, *Wayang Ajen* has traveled in many countries, such as: Greece, India, Egypt, Turkey, China, Korea, Iran, and others. *Wayang Ajen* show, chose “*carangan*” play created by the puppeteer based on the story of Mahabharata and Ramayana. This research is based on direct observation in a various occasion, including seeing the audience's response on the stage and understanding the human values of the audience. This study aims to give an overview of the creative interpretations done by a puppeteer who develops a creative economy at the same time in the contemporary Indonesian puppet shows. This study runs a qualitative methods by means the research involved. This study uses the sociological theory communication approach initiated by Nina W. Syam. *Wayang Ajen* as a contemporary Indonesian puppet has shown its existence proportionally in the form of contemporary and professional performing arts in the development of the creative economy. *Wayang Ajen* shows to the world as a diplomacy media of cross-cultural among the nations in the world.

**Keywords:** *Wayang Ajen, art communication sociology, cross-cultural diplomacy media*

### I. INTRODUCTION

*Wayang* is a beautiful mix of five elements, they are: Creation Art (concept and new creation), Stage Art (drama and karawitan), Craft Art (craft and painting), Ripta Art (sanggita and literature), Widya Art (philosophy and education). *Wayang* is a complete form covering aesthetic, ethic, and philosophy). [1]

*Wayang* as a cultural capital is significant to learn, either academically or non-academically. It can become social and symbolic capital for the accomplishment of a nation, especially for *dalang* and the *wayang* artists [2].

*Dalang* and *wayang* artists can be seen by public as outside figure having huge power and mythology on artistic and norm of the people creating illusions to sell products [3].

Contemporary world is a world created from the culture of seeing and being seen. There are shifting from oral culture, written culture to watching culture [4]. *Wayang* is including in it. It is not only the *adiluhung* or prominent work but it has also been a part of contemporary culture.

*Wayang Ajen* Puppet as a contemporary Indonesian puppet is a world masterpiece that has been recognized by UNESCO

since 2003. UNESCO's recognition can survive if the puppeteers and puppet artists in Indonesia continue without stopping to preserve, develop, and use puppets in new ways to keep abreast of the times. The puppeteers are generally understood as traditional artists from generation to generation rooted in the *wayang* cultural traditions in Java, Bali and Sunda. The *wayang* artists are understood as modern artists not hereditary which are rooted in contemporary *wayang* culture in various regions in Indonesia.

*Wayang Ajen* are one of Indonesia's contemporary *wayang* groups that already have national and international reputations. *Wayang Ajen* has performed in various regions in Indonesia as much as ± 200 in various cities / districts / provinces in Indonesia, from 1999 - 2019 with various *carangan* plays sourced from Mahabharata and Ramayana. Has also performed 52 times in various countries outside Indonesia, including: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, South Korea, India, Japan, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Sweden, the Netherlands, Brazil, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt and Iran. Starting in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018 (interview Wawan Ajen, June 11, 2019). This evidence is the reason why *Ajen's* puppet was chosen as the subject of research material which is presented in part in the results of this article.

*Wayang Ajen* in quantity has shown authentic evidence based on direct observation records, and the participation of researchers involved as consultants working on especially in technical writing dramatic plays to be A fundamental difference between traditional puppet shows and contemporary puppets is in the process of interpreting the plays that originate from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Traditional puppets initially more often carry the standard plays (meaning according to the plays passed down from generation to generation) because of that many repetitive plays (repetition). In addition, the appearance of *carangan* plays (meaning there are interpretations that take characters or events from the standard play to be different from the original) because it starts to appear *carangan* play results from the creative interpretation of the mastermind. But still inherited and brought in a repetitive way (repetition). Repetitive traits become more prominent in traditional *wayang*, although new dynamics take place, such as the use of glamorous stage artistry and promotion through cassette recordings, VCDs, DVDs and internet media, such as YouTube.

Meanwhile, contemporary puppets brought to life by creative young puppeteers or also by puppet artists (not puppeteers but carrying out their love of puppets with new puppet-based creations) have been noted to do a lot of novelty, both in the way of performances, how to speak, how to communicate in various forms of contemporary puppet shows. Where the plays shown are *carangan* plays that are far different from the original source, and are not repetition but dynamic engineering. His real name is Wawan Gunawan, which is now more popular with the nickname Wawan Ajen acting as puppeteer Ajen being one of the generations of puppeteers and contemporary *wayang* artists that should be used as examples in his creativity, communication, especially communication between cultures outside Indonesia.

## II. METHOD

The research method is descriptive qualitative, in which the researcher is a participant observer. The theory which is applied is the Sociology of Communication Theory was conceived by Nina W. Syam since 2013 which was a source of inspiration for researchers towards the use of the theory to become an art communication sociology. The sociology of communication becomes an approach to understanding art, in the context of the *Wayang Ajen* as an intercultural medium of cultural diplomacy. One that is used as the basis for the development of communication sociology is a cultural scheme based on the thought of Tamotso Shibutani in Nina W. Syam [5].

"A person's cultural scheme, conventionally, is influenced by manifest actions, relics of artifacts (symbols), and other characteristics of certain societies. Understanding culture means understanding one's actions. That is the importance of interaction that will produce communication. This means that each individual guides himself through the transfer of perspective with whom they communicate and their cultural environment".

Starting from this reference, awareness of cultural schemes becomes very important. Someone (in this case Wawan Ajen) admitted initially learning traditional puppet and puppet conventions. His admiration for the Girihardja puppet-style puppet show pioneered by puppeteer Abeng Sunarya (more popularly called Abah Sunarya) and developed by his children (Ade, Asep, Iden) encouraged him to be more serious in increasing his skills and knowledge about puppet show, especially Girihardja's style. His desire to learn from the mastermind Asep Sunandar Sunarya, but because of the "busyness of the show" puppeteer Asep Sunandar Sunarya is very dense, finally he studied in Iden Sunarya (his younger brother Asep Sunandar Sunarya). Conventionally studied puppet show and finally had the courage to appear in several shows in the area. The manifest action was able to complete his doctoral studies at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences at UNPAD (Padjadjaran University) Bandung by writing a dissertation on *Wayang golek* in Karawang (interview by Wawan Ajen, June 11, 2019).

In addition, a meeting with literary and cultural observer Saini KM, as a leader in his place of work as a civil servant, gave a strong motivation to develop masterminding skills

because he was often given the opportunity to perform, as well as an understanding of dramaturgy. In addition, meetings with researchers (Arthur S. Nalan) since 2000 encouraged him to learn to write dramatic and interesting plays. Finally dared to give birth to puppets Ajen. Even the name "Ajen" is a gift from researchers which means that in Sundanese language it respects. *Wayang Ajen* is understood as a *wayang* that respects the roots and origins but is presented in a contemporary way. One of the influences of Saini KM and Arthur S. Nalan is that in the creative process of creating the plays, which until now has given birth to forty-five *carangan* plays (plays originating from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* but the creative interpretations of the *dalang* are different from the original, especially in dramatic structures and story themes).

Understanding the creative actions and masterminds of Dalang Wawan Ajen who continuously create and innovate based on the results of interaction in the association, researchers are involved in many activities of the Puppet Ajen activities that are often asked as "introductory" performances and provide "input and criticism" for the progress of the Ajen Puppet which is always give birth to "novelty-novelty". The consequence of choice as a contemporary Indonesian puppet has a millennial "spirit of the age" because it always communicates with its cultural environment. The art of *wayang* has always been communicated by puppeteers Ajen with local and global communities and will continue to do so. The process which is conducted is fluid and ephemeral) [6].

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Puppet Ajen as a Cultural Media of Cultural Diplomacy

To be able to survive in a culture, people need a certain knowledge about the surrounding organization [7]. Besides, there is significance of the culture which is adaptive in characteristics [8]. The same thing happens to the resilience of Wawan Ajen as a puppeteer toward his surrounding realm.

His work position as a civil servant in the environment of the Ministry of Culture and then shifting to the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism, gives many opportunities for *Wayang Ajen* to carry out his work to also carry out duties as a puppeteer who carries "the message of the state" in several state activities, both domestically and in overseas. However, on his journey, *Wayang Ajen* participated in many international festivals without bringing a "state message" but carrying a freer "cultural message", often freedom of communication with foreign audiences of different cultures contributed to the country (Indonesia) as an "ambassador for cultural diplomacy". *Wayang Ajen* keeps maintaining to develop the alternating current between art and living power which appreciate and practice art within the passion and self-existence on the art practice. It certainly increases enthusiasm and spirit which is more enlivening [9].

## IV. CONCLUSION

The process of awareness that *Wayang Ajen* can be used as cultural media for cultural diplomacy based on Wawan Ajen's long journey in the world of puppets, both as conventional puppeteers, especially Sundanese puppet puppets, as well as

contemporary puppet artists who continuously develop the types of puppets, types of stories, and types of messages. As Tamar Katriel proposes about from “Context” to “Contexts” on Intercultural Communication Research focusing on the differences between “context of situation” and “contexts of culture” both dimensions of context-the unique physical and psychological environment of a speech situation, and the cultural understandings and expectations that go into its production-have been incorporated into studies of intercultural communication [10]. *Wayang Ajen* applies the two.

Returning to the intent and purpose of this article, introducing one of Indonesia's contemporary puppet creators who has cross-cultural achievements, bringing *wayang* through the world in "humanitarian messages".

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Solichin, *Wayang Karya Agung Budaya Dunia*. Jakarta: Senawangi, 2003, p. 2.
- [2] N. Abercrombie, S. Hill and B.S. Turner, *Kamus Sosiologi*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010.
- [3] J. Smiers, *Arts under Pressure: Memperjuangkan keanekaragaman budaya di era globalisasi*. Yogyakarta: Insist., 2009.
- [4] Y.A. Piliang and J. Jaelani, *Teori Budaya Kontemporer: Penjelajahan Tanda Dan Makna*. Yogyakarta: Aurora, 2018.
- [5] N.W. Syam, *Sosiologi Komunikasi*. Bandung: Media Cendekia Publisher, 2013, p. 33.
- [6] K. Sen, D.T. Hill, S. Syah and Stanley, *Media, budaya dan politik di Indonesia*. Institut Studi Arus Informasi (ISAI): Media Lintas Inti Nusantara, 2001.
- [7] D. Kaplan, A.A. Manners and L. Simatupang, *Teori budaya*. Pustaka Pelajar, 1999.
- [8] Sanderson, Stephen K, *Makro Sosiologi: Sebuah Pendekatan Terhadap Realitas Sosial*, Jakarta: PT Rajagrafindo Persada, 2010, p.45.
- [9] [9] Marianto, M Dwi, *Art & Life Force in a Quantum Perspective*, Yogyakarta: Scritto Book Publisher, 2017, p.xi-xii.
- [10] [10] Katriel, Tamar, From Context” to “Contexts” in *Cultural Communication Research* (article) in Wiseman, Richard L (ed), *Intercultural Communication Theory, International and Intercultural Annual, Volume XIX*, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publication, 1995, p. 271.