

Portraits of Puppet Art *Thimplong* at District Nganjuk: Reduction of Local Culture in the Acceleration of Nowadays Era

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Abstract

This paper studies on how puppets as a media for preaching. One of them is puppet *Thimplong* brought by Eyang Sariguna. This puppet settings come from the Kingdoms of Kediri, Jenggala, Majapahit, *Babad Tanah Jawi*, and legends around Nganjuk. Currently, this puppet is rarely used and almost extinct. Therefore, the acceleration between this puppet and modern culture is needed for gaining acceptance among societies.

Keywords: Puppet *Thimplong*, preaching, extinction, preservation

Abstrak

Tulisan ini melihat bagaimana wayang sebagai media dakwah. Salah satunya adalah Wayang *Thimplong* yang merupakan kesenian yang dibawa oleh Eyang Sariguna. Lakon Wayang *Thimplong* berlatarbelakang pada cerita Kerajaan Kediri, Jenggala, Majapahit, *Babad Tanah Jawi* dan legenda yang ada di sekitar wilayah Nganjuk. Saat ini wayang *thimplong* jarang sekali digunakan dan nyaris punah. Oleh karena itu, perlu adanya akulturasi dengan budaya modern agar bisa diterima masyarakatnya.

Kata Kunci: Wayang *Thimplong*, dakwah, kepunahan, Pelestarian.

INTRODUCTION

District Nganjuk is one of districts in East Java Province. It has appeared since the early 10th Century in the Anjuk Ladang Insription¹. In 17th Century, several areas in Nganjuk belongs to Mancanegara Wetan, under the hegemony of the Kingdom of Mataram². Meanwhile, during the colonial era (1831 AD)³ until the Japanese invasion, Nganjuk was a district (afdeeling). The development of this city continues as time goes by.

As an area that has been around for a long time, Nganjuk has various arts as a form of indigenous local culture there. These arts include: *Mung Dhe* dance, *Sandhur* arts, Puppet *Gedog*, and Puppet *Thimplong*. Those arts were born and developed in Nganjuk until now. The uniqueness of wach arts become an identity for District Nganjuk. Whether we realize or whether it is explained, the regional identity forms national identity. Therefore, the original arts, and others regional arts, constitute a systemic arrangement shaping national culture, Indonesia.

The existence of several arts originated in Nganjuk (nowadays) experiences decadence. Puppet *Thimplong* in local folklore is an art brought by Eyang Sariguna, a Mataram soldier. This art existed in Nganjuk in the 18th / 19th AD and had Eyang Sariguna as the first puppeteer⁴. Puppet *Thimplong* is based on the stdy of the Kingdoms of Kediri, Jenggala, Majapahit, *Babad Tanah Jawi*, and legends around Nganjuk⁵. The other uniqueness is that the puppets are made of the wood of Waru Tengis (a tree that only exist in Pace, Nganjuk) not a leather.

Puppet Art *Thimplong* requires special attention. This art is reduced by globalization as a acceleration of nowadays era which is destructive to local culture. This is reflected in the society ignorance of puppet *Thimplong* in Nganjuk⁶. This ignorance is a result of infrequently performance of puppet *Thimplong*. Currently, puppet *Thimplong* is only

¹ J. Brendes, *Oud-Javaansch Oorkonden, Nagelaten Transcripties, VBG Deel LX*, (Batavia: Albrecht/ 's-Hage: M. Nijhoff, 1913), p 89.

² Aminuddin Kasdi, *Perkembangan Birokrasi Tradisional di Jawa pada Abad XIV-XVIII (Kajian pada Periode Akhir Mataram)*, (Surabaya: Unesa University Press, 2011), pp 46-48

³ ANRI, *Resolutie. Bijlage XXV*. Perjanjian Sepreh, 3 Juli 1830. (w.g.) van Lawick van Pabst.

⁴ Damari, Samsul Hadi, and Aries Trio Efendy, *Kabupaten Pace Dalam Lintas Sejarah*, (Nganjuk: Kantor Perpustakaan dan Arsip Kabuapten Nganjuk, 2014), p. 44.

⁵ Harimintadji, Habib M., Santoso, Suranto, dan Suwarno, *Nganjuk dan Sejarah*, (Nganjuk: Yayasan Salepuk, 2003), hlm. 180.

⁶ Interview with Bisri Mustofa (21), Ulfa Hidayati (21), Wiwik Supraptiwi (63), Darmaji (24), Valeria Lisa O. (16), Anita Rahayu (20), Agus Sutrisno (66), Juminten (56), Yellda A. (21), M. Grisa (23) and Lamijo (50), on 24 August - 5 November 2017. The respondents are local people of Nganjuk with multi region, age, education and profession background.

performed once a year, at *Nyadranan*⁷ in Kepanjen, Pace, Nganjuk. When this problem is not addressed properly, it impacts the existence of puppet *Thimplong*. It will disappear gradually. This fact is real, due to only an active puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong* in Nganjuk.

In addition, youth generations, who have watched puppet *thimplong* performance, are not excited since they do not understand the language used in the performance of puppet *Thimplong* (Javanese language: *Kromo Inggil*)⁸. The lack of Javanese Language mastery among youth generations in Nganjuk is another concern. The Javanese language is replaced by another language gradually. The moral and identity crisis must be dealt with immediately before the local language and culture completely assimilated by globalization. This should become a national concern, for puppet *Thimplong* continues to be preserved and developed.

The accentuation of puppet *Thimplong* is not only about its existence as a local culture, but also its value for national value. There are many moral values in puppet *Thimplong*. Each story on its performance gives moral message which is relevant towards today's life. Puppet *Thimplong* retains Javanese language for delivering stories. This language rooted in Indonesian culture in plurality form. Furthermore, puppet *Thimplong* has a high social value in which people are mobilized, gathered and interacted in its performance.

Puppet *Thimplong* must be recognized as a culture born in Nganjuk, as an original culture of Indonesia, as a national culture affiliated with national personality. Puppet *Thimplong* is an art unifying the nation. The essence of its performance reflects *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* unifying the nation. Therefore, a solution (not a discourse) is needed for preserving puppet *Thimplong* as the original art of Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

Puppet is a product of human culture containing aesthetic art. Puppet serves as a performance and guidance for human life. Historically, there are various theories about the origin of puppet in the world⁹. First, Hasae states that puppet is originated in Java island. Second, according to N.J. Krom, puppet is originated in India brought along with Hinduism

⁷ *Nyadranan* is a ceremony cleaning up the village. This ceremony is carried out holistically in villages in East Java and some parts of Central Java

⁸ Interview with Vina Widyaningtyas (20), Arfi Prasongko (24), and M. Huda (17) on 24 August - 5 November 2017. The three of them had watched puppet *Thimplong* performance, but they did not understand the story. This is also the case happen on youth generation in Nganjuk.

⁹ Jamal Ghofir, "Nilai Dakwah dalam Kebudayaan Wayang: Pemaknaan Atas Cerita Dewa Ruci", *J Dakwah* 2003, 14(2): 235-261., p. 236.

to Indonesia. Third, there is a theory argues that puppet is originated in China¹⁰. Those multi-perspectives were debunked when UNESCO, on 7 November 2003, declared that puppet as a world cultural heritage from Indonesia¹¹.

Indonesia has various types of puppet spread out in this country including: Shadow Puppet *Purwo*, Puppet *Suluh*, Puppet *Palembang*, Shadow Puppet *Banjar*, Puppet *Beber*, Puppet *Thengul*, Puppet *Golek*, Puppet *Orang*, Mask Puppet, Puppet *Cina*, Puppet *Klitik*, Puppet *Suket*, Puppet *Gedog*, dan Puppet *Thimplong*¹². The last puppet, puppet *Thimplong* is discussed further in this study. This puppet still survives until now in Nganjuk.

1. *Getting to Know Puppet Thimplong*

Puppet *Thimplong* was first introduced by Eyang Sariguna, a soldier of the Islamic kingdom of Mataram in Pace, District Nganjuk. It is around 18th / 19th AD, correlated with the arrival of Eyang Sariguna¹³. Furthermore, there were found social activities even before in Pace, District Nganjuk. In 1677 AD, there were 1000 families as communals¹⁴. Therefore, Pace, as the area occupied by Eyang Sariguna in 18th / 19th AD, can be socio-historically justified.

When the word puppet *Thimplong* is mentioned, it sounds unfamiliar. The exact reason of calling it as puppet *Thimplong* is still uncertain. However, there is a tendency that the term *Thimplong* refers to sound of bamboo xylophone used in Puppet *Thimplong* performance. In puppet *Thimplong* performance, the most dominant sound heard is *plong...plong...plong*.

While other puppets are generally made of weather, wayang *Thimplong* is made of wood from Waru Tengis trees. These trees are only found in Pace. This raises assumption of why Sariguna uses that wood as a main material for making puppet. The tradition of making puppet *Thimplong* using Waru Tengis is still maintained. It makes the puppet *Thimplong* more expensive than others.

¹⁰ Anjar Mukti Wibowo and Prisqa Putra Ardany, "Sejarah Kesenian Wayang Timplong Kabupaten Nganjuk, *J Agastya* 2015, 5 (2): 182-203, p.190

¹¹ Lidya Desriyanti, "Diplomasi Budaya Indonesia Melalui Wayang Kulit di Amerika", *JOM FISIP* 2017, 4 (2): 1-13., p. 2

¹² Kantor Perpustakaan dan Arsip Daerah Kabupaten Nganjuk, *op, cit.*, 25.

¹³ According to writer's interpretation, the existence of Eyang Sariguna was obtained through the family genealogy. This is because puppet *Thimplong* was preserved through lineage, or Sariguna's descendants who stil alive in Pace. Read Damari, Samsul Hadi, and Aries Trio Efendy, *op, cit.*, pp. 43-49

¹⁴ *Manuskrip Instruksi Amangkurat II*. on 2 December 1677., in Aminuddin Kasdi, *Perlawanan Penguasa Madura atas Hegemoni Jawa: Relasi Pusat-Dacrah pada Periode Akhir Mataram (1726-1745)*, (Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2003), p. 166.

The development of puppet *Thimplong* is dealt with the puppeteer. The puppeteers were originally derived genealogically. Sariguna, the creator of puppet *Thimplong* had a brother named Kartodrono. Kartodrono had no children, while Kartoguno had two children named Jewul and Budholusuk. Jewul had a child named Tawar. Meanwhile, Budholusuk had 5 children named Panidi, Madinem, Par, Simpen, and Sinem. All of Budholusuk children did not become puppeteers. Therefore, the existence of puppet *Thimplong* was not continued by them. However, though Ki Tawar's also did not have successor of puppeteer, the puppet *Thimplong* was preserved by Ki Talam and Ki Suwoto. Ki Talam is the father of Ki Suyadi¹⁵, the one and only active puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong* in Nganjuk.



Picture 1 & 2.

Picture of puppet *Thimplong*, *lakon* Queen and Princess Sekartaji¹⁶

Puppet *Thimplong* has 24 titles on its performance. The outlines are as follows: (1) the type of *lakon kasepuhan* performance, which tells on how someone seeks *kaweruh* and contains a lot of advice from a teacher or *Begawan* to her/his student; (2) the type of marriage performance, which tells about the ups and downs of finding a mate and living happily ever after being a husband and wife; (3) the type of birth performance, which tells of birth of an influential figure or a descendant of a king. Those stories were performed using approximately 100 puppet *Thimplong*¹⁷. The puppets are flexible in which the figures of kings, princesses, *punakawan*, and others can use the same puppets, though it has a different story.

¹⁵ Kantor Perpustakaan dan Arsip Daerah Kabupaten Nganjuk, *op. cit.*, hlm. 34.

¹⁶ Writer's personal documentation on 24 August 2017. This property belongs to Suryadi, the one and only active puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong*.

¹⁷ Harimintadji et.al, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

The instruments in puppet *Thimplong* is very simple consisting of only one *gong*, six *kendang*, and three *gambang*. Those are used for accompanying four characteristic features of puppet *Thimplong* including (1) *Gendhing Awe-awe*, which is used when performing a female *golekan* at the beginning of the performance; (2) *Gendhing Grendel*, which is used for accompanying *jejeran* (royal deliberations, giving an advice, or orders to royal courtiers); (3) *Gendhing Ladrang*, which is used for accompanying a war situation; (4) *Gendhing Prahap / Closing*, which is used for accompanying *golekan* dance as a sign of performance ending. The whole stories use Javanese language. This is a tradition carrying out since the puppet created.

2. The Extinction of Puppet Thimplong

The acceleration of nowadays era is an impact of science and technology. The impact is considered as a result for human live convenience. Life become increasingly hedonistic, practical, and individualist. On the one hand, technological advances become the foundation of modern life. On the other hand, it causes crisis of moral and identity on human being. Local culture seems to be replaced by gadgets, social media, or other virtual life. It is time for Indonesian people learning about “the ethics of remembering and the consequences of forgetting”.

The reflection of acceleration is the diminishing prestige of local arts. Puppet *Thimplong* reached its peak in 1970. In 1970, puppet *Thimplong* was performed not only at *Nyadranan* events, but also at wedding party, *khitanan*, or thanksgiving in Nganjuk. Currently, it is only performed once a year at *Nyadranan* in Kepanjen village, Pace, Nganjuk.

When the puppeteer performs, only few people understand the story. This is because the audience do not master Javanese (*Kromo Inggil*) well. Many of them only participate in the puppet performance by holding their gadgets, taking pictures and uploading it on their social media, even without understanding what it is about¹⁸. In this case, Javanese do not take the blame, but the life of millennials is changing. According to writer’s observation, nowadays, people in Nganjuk accustom their children to using Indonesian language, even some using foreign terms at home. This phenomenon happens for following the life-changing. In fact, the regional language and the national language need to be balanced.

¹⁸ Writer’s observation

While the regional language is a national identity, the national language is a unifying language.

This art performance, which is rarely performed, has another tough problem. Currently, there is only one puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong* named Suyadi. Suyadi is the son of Ki Talam, the previous puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong*. The main question is about how an art can be developed when only a puppeteer preserves it. This situation is very crucial, especially when the discussion come to the successor of puppet *thimplong* puppeteer.



Picture 3.

Picture of Ki Suyadi, the last puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong*

The puppeteer is chosen hereditary, while Suyadi's descendants do not have the tendency to become puppeteer. His daughter is a teacher, and his son does not want to be a puppeteer¹⁹. The problem arises when Suyadi's retire from being a puppeteer. Moreover, the question happen whether puppet *Thimplong* become extinct. It is ironic when there will be the extinction of indigenous of Nganjuk local arts performance.

3. The Preservation of Puppet Thimplong

In order to preserve puppet *Thimplong*, the society only need to perform this performance as often as possible at folk events such as wedding party or *khitanan*. This also applies for others performance arts in Indonesia. The problem is that puppet *thimplong* is considered as a boring and an old-fashioned art that is delivered with Javanese language, a language that cannot be understood easily.

The society and the local government are the main components in preserving puppet *Thimplong*. Optimizing the role of local government is a main requirement at this time,

¹⁹ Interview with Suyadi, the puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong* on 24 August 2017

considering that Suyadi did not receive any assistance from the local government due to the preservation of puppet *Thimplong*²⁰. It is detrimental if the preservation is not carried out immediately, given the current situation of puppet *Thimplong*.

Local governments can insert puppet *Thimplong* as art performance in their government events. The more it is performed, the more puppet *Thimplong* is known by the society. They will be interested in performing this show. Furthermore, regular performances can strengthen the identity of Nganjuk.

The preservation can also be carried out by integrating local content subjects or cultural art with puppet *Thimplong* in secondary school. Puppet *Thimplong* contains local wisdom values. The stories relate to local story about the birth of several villages in Nganjuk, including *Sinencongari*, *Lahire* Jaka Slawah, Jaka Ombak, *Bedhae* Tanjung Anom, *Bujan Negara*, and *Kalimati*. It can attract excitement from the students since it relates to the area where they live.

By preserving puppet *Thimplong* at schools, the problem of mastering Javanese language is also resolved. Javanese language become Javanese disparity. Indeed, in performing puppet *Thimplong*, the puppeteer uses high level of Javanese language (*Kromo Inggil*) which give another difficulty to youth to understand the story. The writer had a thought to suggest performing puppet *thimplong* using Indonesian language. It makes the performance easier to understand for youth. However, the commutation prolongs the disparity between the Javanese people with their language. The commutation will also reduce and destroy the essence of puppet *Thimplong* as a local culture. For this reason, it is more efficient to learn both puppet *Thimplong* and Javanese language at school. Javanese language is preserved along with puppet *thimplong*. Learning puppet *Thimplong* at school will be facilitated by teacher who waster Javanese language (*Kromo Inggil*) or Javanese language teacher. The students will be able to understand both puppet *thimplong* and Javanese language better.

In addition, it seems more effective when puppet *thimplong* is raised as extracurricular activities. The students will go deeper learning puppet *thimplong* as a cultural heritage. By raising it as extracurricular activities, puppet *thimplong* become familiar. When all secondary schools implement this idea, there will be no extinction of local arts in Nganjuk. The teachers' role must be more massive. It is not certain that they master and understand

²⁰ Interview with Suyadi, the puppeteer of puppet *Thimplong* on 24 August 2017

the history of puppet *Thimplong*, the types of puppets, the instruments, the performance tools, and so on. The government need to educate the teachers first in Nganjuk about puppet *Thimplong* or other arts performance. MGMP, as a forum where the subject teachers are gathered, can be used as a media for training them. Therefore, the preservation runs well.

According to the writer, moreover, the puppeteer should be allowed outside of heredity. The hereditary selection makes these arts fade away. Basically, the more puppeteers can perform, the more opportunity of this puppet can be developed. The students who have been introduced to puppet *Thimplong*, is able to be puppeteer. This is a positive result of preserving puppet *thimplong*. In order to realize the efforts, there must be approaches to Suyadi as the descendants of the first puppeteer for achieving the proposal.

By having many puppeteers, it is expected that more performances performed. This can be developed further. Technological advances and globalization can be used for the development of puppet *thimplong*. Korean artists' live broadcasts on social media are very attractive to young people. Puppet *thimplong* could also be broadcasted live via social media or mobile applications on smartphones to attract young people. this is a new way to preserve local culture. Technological advances in the acceleration of today's progress can be used intelligently to preserve local culture in Indonesia.

Puppet *thimplong* is not only the heritage of Nganjuk community, but also the people of Indonesia. The preservation of local Nganjuk culture is a form of preservation of Indonesian culture. Puppet *thimplong* is a media that unites the nation, because it is a national art, born and developed in Indonesia. It is time for puppet *thimplong* to flourish, known not only by the nganjuk community, but also by Indonesian people and the world. It needs attention, creative ideas, and efforts (which are not discourses) from all parties so that puppet *thimplong* and other arts in Indonesia continue to prosper and stay far from extinction.

Conclusion

Nganjuk has many local arts, one of which is puppet *thimplong*. The art was created by Sariguno, a Mataram solcier who lived in Pace, Nganjuk. This art is thought to have been born in 18th century AD. The uniqueness of puppet *thimplong* is in the material. This puppet is made from Waru Tengis tree wood. Puppet *thimplong* has 24 stories, which are divided into three types, *lakon kasepuhan*, *lakon perkawinan* and *lakon kelahiran*. Some of the stories

in puppet *thimplong* performances include local stories of Nganjuk, such as *Sinencongari*, *Lahire Jaka Slewah*, *Jaka Ombak*, *Bedhae Tanjung Anom*, *Bujan Negara* and *Kalimati*.

Puppet *thimplong* is currently not recognized by the Nganjuk community itself. This art is only performed once a year in Pace District, Nganjuk Regency. This makes puppet *thimplong* less well known. the performance, which uses Javanese language (*kromo inggil*), does not seem to be understood by young people in Nganjuk Regency. Another problem is that there is only one puppeteer of puppet *thimplong*. The absence of a successor from Suyadi's lineage (the current *Thimplong* puppeteer) makes this art even more concerning. A solution is desperately needed to overcome this problem, in order to preserve local Nganjuk arts.

Solutions and real efforts are needed to preserve puppet *thimplong* art. It is hoped that Nganjuk Regency Government can endeavor to preserve the puppet *thimplong* by carrying out regular performances. Puppet *thimplong* performance can be conducted by related agencies to coincide with major governmental event. With more frequent performances, the Nganjuk community will know more about this art. In addition, there must be aids and assistance in form of new equipments and innovations from local government to make puppet *thimplong* more attractive.

Another solution that can be applied is to integrate puppet *thimplong* art in schools, especially in cultural arts and local contents subjects. Alternatively, this art can be made an extracurricular activity. Teaching puppet *thimplong* early in schools makes it easier to understand Javanese as the language for puppet *thimplong* performances. In order to preserve puppet *thimplong* properly in schools, the Nganjuk local government can initiate education for teachers through teacher organization (MGMP). The last solution to preserve this art is to allow general public to become *thimplong* puppeteer. The more puppeteers there are, the more often this art will be performed. Hopefully, this art continues to flourish in the acceleration of Indonesia.

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Interviews

Name	Age	Occupation	Address
Suyadi	49 y.o	The puppeteer of puppet <i>thimplong</i>	Ds. Kepanjen, Kec. Pace, Kab. Nganjuk
Agus Sutrisno	66 y.o	Merchant	Ds. Jeruk, Kec. Baron, Kab. Nganjuk
Anita Rahayu	20 y.o	Student	Ds. Mojokendil, Kec. Baron, Kab. Nganjuk
Arfi Prasongko	24 y.o	Farmer	Ds. Pacewetan, Kec. Pace, Kab. Nganjuk
Bisri Mustofa	21 y.o	Student	Ds. Watudandang Kec. Prambon, Kab. Nganjuk
Darmaji	24 y.o	Farmer	Ds. Sumbersono, Kec. Pramboon, Kab. Nganjuk
Juminten	56 y.o	housewife	Ds. Watudandang Kec. Prambon, Kab. Nganjuk
Lamijo	50 y.o	Elementary school guard	Ds. Jetis, Kec. Pace, Kab. Nganjuk
M. Grisa	23 y.o	Student	Ds. Lambang Kuning, Kec. Kertosono, Kab. Nganjuk
M. Huda	17 y.o	Senior high school student	Ds. Pace, Kec. Pace, Kab. Nganjuk
Sutoyo	47 y.o	Farmer	Ds. Pacewetan, Kec. Pace, Kab. Nganjuk
Ulfa Hidayanti	21 y.o	Student	Ds. Gebangkerep, Kec. Baron, Kab. Nganjuk
Varelia Lisa O.	16 y.o	Senior high school student	Ds. Kepel, Kec. Ngetos, Kab. Nganjuk
Vina W.	20 y.o	Student	Ds. Ngujung, Kec. Gondang, Kab. Nganjuk

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Wiwiek S.	63 y.o	Pensioner	Ds. Banjardowo, Kec. Lengkong, Kab. Nganjuk
Yelda A.	21 y.o	Student	Kec. Bagor, Kab. Nganjuk