

## Conference Paper

# Ecological Concept of Wayang Stories and the Relation with Natural Conservation in Javanese Society

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## Abstract

Wayang is one of the Javanese performing arts that has a great value in Javanese society. The aim of this research is to describe and explain the ecological concept of the wayang story in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This qualitative descriptive research uses an ethnographic approach. Data were collected by using domain analysis techniques, taxonomic analysis, compositional analysis, and theme analysis. Data validation uses the extra participation technique, perseverance observation, triangulation, detailed discussion, and auditing. The research found that the ecological concept in wayang stories can be found in some used term and the motto, which relates to the term 'environment conservation'. This term is found in the narration of the story and the dialog of wayang characters, and some mottos are also found that are related to the nature conservation effort. With regard to the results of this research, it can be said that the ecological concept in wayang stories also has functions relating to natural conservation and preservation for the society in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

**Keywords:** ecological concept, Javanese literature, natural conservation, wayang story

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Received: 6 April 2018  
 Accepted: 3 May 2018  
 Published: 26 July 2018

Publishing services provided by  
**Knowledge E**

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ISLLE 2017 Conference Committee.

## 1. Introduction

*Wayang* is one of the arts formed in a shadow puppet or performing shadow [1]. Leather-formed wayang refers to the main material used for the puppets. It is a skin made usually of buffalo skin [2]. The art of *wayang* is very well known among the Javanese community as a local art of their ancestral heritage. Therefore, in 2003, UNESCO established *wayang* as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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Wayang originated in Central Java and Yogyakarta and then spread to other areas on Java Island. Wayang tells stories taken from Ramayana and Mahabharata stories. The Ramayana–Mahabharata stories are full of meaning and raise social, environmental, economic, strategic, and political issues framed in royal stories [3, 4]. So, it can be said that wayang is very close to people’s daily lives, especially in Javanese society.

Wayang is not merely performed as entertainment but also has an educative function. Many lessons and life values can be learned from a wayang performance [5, 6]. For example, wayang can be used as a means to teach the concept of ecology and environmental preservation to Javanese society. It is also revealed by Endraswara and Dewi that it is essential in literature to contain several elements related to ecology and this can be discovered by using the disciplines of literary ecology [7, 8]. Ecology is a reciprocal system between living beings and the natural surroundings [9]. The relationship of the living things in question is the relationship between humans, animals, plants, and nature. The reciprocal interrelationships of these living things in wayang stories will be further studied by using literature ecology analysis.

## 2. Methods

This research takes the form of descriptive qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic study has a particular function in describing and interpreting a cultural, social group or system. Although the meaning of culture is very wide, ethnographic studies usually focus on activity, language, beliefs, rituals, and ways of living [10]. The research data were taken from several wayang stories spread across Central Java and Yogyakarta. The collected data were then analyzed using domain analysis techniques, taxonomic analysis, composition analysis, and theme analysis. To test the validity of the data, data triangulation techniques were used. Data triangulation is used to check the validity of data by exploiting something else [11]. In addition to triangulation techniques, extra participation techniques, preservation observations, detailed discussions, and audits were also used to validate data.

## 3. Results

Wayang is footage or a representation of human life symbolized in shadows. Every human character is represented in every wayang character [2]. Thus, wayang is an imitation of human life in the art dimension. Stories in wayang also raise issues related

to human life [12] such as social problems, economics, culture, politics, and sometimes also the latest issues such as environmental damage.

The concept of ecology as previously described addresses the reciprocity between living things life [13]. In this case, they are humans, animals, plants, and nature. Wayang as a representation of community life in the dimension of performing arts also contains some ecological concepts. This can be seen from several plays that have become the object of this research. The plays were drawn from wayang plays in Central Java and Yogyakarta. In the following will be presented some ecological concepts, in this case regarding the human relationship with animals, plants, and nature.

### 3.1. Humans with animals

The natural ecosystem consists of a variety of interacting species. These interactions are not always positively conducted but rather are sometimes negative; the positive interaction is called 'symbiotic mutualism' [14]. Humans as one species in natural ecosystems have always sought to maintain the balance of nature and create positive interactions [15] by not hunting animals arbitrarily and making them pets or display.

In wayang stories, there are also examples of the relationship between humans and animals, both positive and negative (destructive relationship). In the story of 'Pandu Papa', it is told that one-day Prabu Pandu was walking on the edge of the woods along with Dewi Madrim and saw a pair of deer mating. Prabu Pandu then arched the stag to death. Unexpectedly the deer turned out to be the incarnation of Resi Kimindana who was with his wife. Because Prabu Pandu had done something wrong, Resi Kimindana condemned Prabu Pandu and Dewi Madrim. This is an indirect example of a negative relationship between humans and animals that ultimately causes damage and punishment (in this case Prabu Pandu was cursed). Not only examples of negative relationships, but also examples of positive relationships between humans and animals can be found in wayang stories: for example, a good relationship between Prabu Rama and apes in Kendhalisada kingdom and with a bird named Resi Jatayu [16]. In addition, there was a good relationship between Bima who had resided with his brothers in the form of animals.

### 3.2. Human relationships with plants

The ecological concept that deals with human relationships with plants can be seen from the story of 'Brubuh Alengka', one of the Ramayana stories. In that story it is told

that there was a plant of the gods that could heal wounds and bring back the dead; the leaf was called the 'Maosadilata Leaf'. It also indicates that plants have various functions in human life [17]. In addition to being a producer of oxygen, providing food for animals and humans, it can also be used for healing wounds. Among the herbs that can be used are turmeric, ginger, betel leaf, marsh fleabane, and many others.

### 3.3. Human relationships with the environment

The form of human relationships with the environment is also found in some puppet plays. The environment of wayang figures is often represented by the nature of human habitation: for instance, in the 'Rama Tambak' story, which represents the destruction of the peripheral ecosystem. When Rama wanted to invade Alengkawas he was hindered by a huge sea that caused him to release an arrow aimed at drying the sea. The seawater became hot, and many animals and plants were found dead. Finally, Batara Baruna, the Hyang Baruna came out and begged Rama to immediately withdraw his heirloom. This example is particularly relevant to the present-day situation where many people dumping garbage, waste, and dirt in the sea and rivers pollute the aquatic ecosystem [18].

The marine ecosystem, in this case, is the ocean, which stores a wealth, not only fishery resources but also another biota such as coral reefs, seagrasses, and other marine plants that are essential for maintaining natural ecosystems [19]. The symbol of the ocean that saves a lot of wealth and strength is reflected in the 'Dewa Ruci' story where Bima at that time sought 'Tirta Perwita Sari' (Water of Life) in the Minangkabau Ocean. At that moment Bima met with Dewa Ruci who was as a symbol of god. In the play 'Anoman Duta' in Alengka, there was a riot because Anoman used fire. At that time there was great chaos in the land of Alengka because the fire almost destroyed the whole land of Alengka. This is a lesson to humans not to play with fire, as even the remains of a cigar can cause a great fire to burn down the forest.

## 4. Conclusion

Wayang Javanese art performance is local cultural heritage. Wayang represents human life in the dimensions of the art of prestige. The stories in the plays are very close to the problems of human life, such as social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental issues. In relation to environmental issues, there are some ecological concepts or relationships between humans and animals, plants, and the environment. The

relationships are reflected in several puppet plays scattered throughout Central Java and the DIY. The ecology concept in puppet performances can be used as learning for the Javanese society about the importance of maintaining harmony with other living things. This is because today human consciousness has decreased its maintenance and preservation of the natural ecosystem. In addition, education is also one of the functions of wayang as a means of showing the community the importance of maintaining a relationship with nature and the ecosystem.

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