

Shadow Puppets In The Hands Of The Young Puppeteers Loss Of Philosophy Value

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This study aims to actualize philosophical values in shadow puppets performances for the puppeteer and the younger generation. The object of this research is a shadow puppets performance by young puppeteers in Surakarta and its surroundings. Recently, many young puppeteers have appeared arrogantly on stage, for example: standing up and trampling puppet with their feet, throwing puppet off the stage, cursing or saying rude things, exploiting sexual objects for jokes. Whether we realize it or not, one of the causes of this phenomenon is the gap in understanding the philosophical values of puppetry. Data collection methods in this study were the observation of performances and interviews, while to understand the meaning of symbols captured in shadow puppets performances, the method of understanding meaning was used. The notion of "understanding the meaning" in this context is how meaning can be captured from the puppeteers' expressions, either in the form of *sabet* (puppets movement), *catur* (puppeteer vocals), and music presented. The result of this research is an attempt to find the factors that influence the tendency of the young puppeteers to express freely. Finding the factors that influence the more youthful generation tends to like glamorous entertainment alone—actualizing philosophical values in shadow puppets according to the contemporary point of view. The ability of the puppeteers to present messages through shadow puppets performances should have direct implications for his personality, in addition to being a means of mass communication that can reach all levels of society (audience) in general.

Keywords: shadow puppets, young generation puppeteer, philosophy value, performance.

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INTRODUCTION

On the commemoration of World Puppet Day 2015 at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia -ISI-) in Surakarta, Anom Dwijo Kangko, a young puppeteer who was currently popular, suddenly became angry using harsh words in the middle of the show (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePVy7OzTcA>). He also threw his puppets off the stage, then stood in front of the musicians. His eyes bulged, screaming like someone who was in a trance. The audience who saw the incident was quite shocked. Even when that part of the show was uploaded to social media, such as YouTube, almost all comments from the public were deploring and blaspheming the behavior of the "mastermind." How could Javanese shadow puppets, full of highly respected traditional values, be treated this way? But that's the reality. Most of the young puppeteers need a sensation so that their performance becomes a conversation, then indirectly raises their name to be better known.

If we open YouTube with the keywords "angry puppeteers," "puppeteers throwing puppets," "puppeteers seeking sensation," many videos will appear showing the puppeteers distorting the puppet show. The puppeteer who should only play the puppets then participates in the drama by standing up, facing the audience, performing theatre, etc. In this context, the shadow puppet show becomes absurd; the shadow puppets seem to have no longer the power to tell a story (commonly called a *lakon*) originating from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, but instead, say to the life story of the puppeteer. Even though the puppeteer is supposed to be an "invisible" figure, he is indeed the one who moves the puppets, he also makes sounds, but all of that is merely to bring the puppets to life ([Clara van Groenendaal, 1987](#)). In this context, the true essence of shadow puppets shows is getting lost. The physical appearance of the theatrical performance appears but lacks positive values.

Conventionally puppet already has its substance and method of delivering messages without having to "sell" the puppeteer's body. The essence of moral teachings, decency, character, and even entertainment is found in the *lakon* (story), *sanggit* (the storyline), puppet characters, and other performances ([Fadri, 2021](#)). Therefore, the puppet is commonly referred to as a symbol of human life or *wewayangane ngaurip* ([Suyanto et al., 2011](#)). Each puppet play has a mission of wisdom of life ([Priyadi, 2021](#)). For example, *Wahyu Makutarama's* play teaches humans to be good leaders; *The Pendaran Siswa Sokalima* gave a message that people should

master science optimally, while *Kumbakarna Gugur* gave an example of the spirit of patriotism. In principle, the *lakon* of puppets are exemplary moral teachings that are very contemplative, so that humans always do good and are helpful for society ([Nasif & Wilujeng, 2018](#)), away from the noise to gain the popularity of the puppeteer. The shadow puppets have various characters to play ([Sulistiyan et al., 2019](#)), some are good, and some are bad. For example, the character Duryodhana is greedy, Puntadewa is patient and honest, Krishna is wise, Abhimanyu is brave, Sengkuni is cunning, etc. All of that is an offer in a puppet show to give the audience or followers a choice. The example of morals and manners has become clear, and it is only up to the audience to choose the noble or the despicable.

Indeed, in this era of globalization, the life of shadow puppets performing arts faces challenges, because like it or not, one must dare to compete with the more popular arts ([Irianto et al., 2018](#)). Therefore, the puppeteers as performers must always try to improve the quality of shadow puppets' performances to continue to exist. The swift currents of globalization continue to erode local culture. Facing this reality, the puppeteer must strengthen his competitiveness, especially among the younger generation; shadow puppets must appear more attractive ([Ni Made, 2021](#)). Therefore, the puppeteers need to continuously pursue the creation and innovation of shadow puppets' performances ([Nyoman Sedana, 2016](#)). In the last decade, there have actually been many young puppeteers who have made reforms in the form of shadow puppet shows, but most of them serve the audience and follow the trends of the times; so that the "spirit" of the shadow puppets show itself is blurred and has even disappeared. One of the reasons for this is the lack of understanding of the young puppeteers on the philosophy of the puppets show itself ([Jurkowski, 2018](#)). They view shadow puppets art as the same as other pop arts.

It is possible to develop and renew puppets' performances following the demands of the times while still relying on established norms (*paugeran*) in the art of puppetry ([Pradita et al., 2017](#)). The definition of well-established in this case does not mean stagnant but rather adheres to the principle that puppets are a presentation of *edipenian* and *adiluhung* values. *Edipeni* means a spectacle that expresses beauty ([Dwijonagoro, 2014](#)), while *adiluhung* is a performing art that conveys messages full of noble human values ([Riyanto & Mataram, 2018](#)). To achieve this quality, puppeteer artists should understand the philosophical values of

shadow puppets performances that have implications for their personality and implement them in their work.

In working on *pakeliran* (presentation), the puppeteer can freely express his ideas to develop his creativity (Ciobotaru, 2018). The puppeteer in working on this *pakeliran* performance must master the method or steps of working on the six elements of *pakeliran*, namely *garap lakon* (story), *garap adegan* (working on scenes-each part of the show), *garap catur* (conversations between puppets), *garap tokoh* (working on characters), *garap sabet* (puppet movement), and *garap iringan* (music). So, based on the "spirit" and establishment, shadow puppets' performances are presented through working on *pakeliran*. The synergy of these two things is expected to produce a quality puppet show that is *edipeni* and *adiluhung*. The culmination of this artistic creativity will create a puppet show that is predicated as a "masterpiece" (Sudarsono, 2014). Seeing the phenomenon of shadow puppets' performances today, there are several exciting things to study, including 1) The tendency of young puppeteers to present their works freely. 2) The audience's tendency (the younger generation) to watch glamorous entertainment and; 3) both the puppeteer and the audience no longer care about the philosophy of puppets performances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The object of this research is a shadow puppet show that includes the puppeteer and the audience, especially the younger generation. Therefore, the data collection process is not only carried out through direct observation of performances but also interviews with puppeteers or shadow puppet audiences and library observations to support the analysis (Ciesielska et al., 2018). The observation steps carried out are as follows. First, the observation of shadow puppet performances is done by recording the puppeteer's messages in the *pakeliran* and the audience's impression of the *pakeliran* presented by the puppeteer. Next, the results of these observations were transcribed as a whole. The data writing method uses a descriptive-qualitative model (Rahmat, 2009). Descriptive writing methods in cultural research, including philosophy, can be applied to study and describe the structure of culture or a specific philosophical thought (Angadi, 2019).

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, both to the puppeteer of the show and the audience or fans. In addition to the young puppeteers as presenters of the performances studied, interviews were conducted

with senior puppeteers in the Surakarta area, especially those still active and existing in the community. The following data processing and data analysis procedures are applied for data analysis to be organized in a pattern, category, and fundamental unit of description. First, data reduction is made by writing data obtained randomly in a report. Then, the data is inventoried with data in text or recordings in detail. Next, all the data collected are summarized, selected, and focused on things that are considered essential, then look for the substance and patterns (Rijali, 2018).

Second, data whose essence has been determined at the time of data reduction are classified according to their substance, using the categories of philosophical approaches to axiology, aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology (Dazeley & Kang, 2008). To understand the meaning of the symbols captured through the data collected, the method of understanding meaning or *verstehen* is used (Pinner, 2016). In this case, the notion of "understanding meaning" is how meaning can be captured (Green, 2009), both literally and visually, from the symbols in the conventions of the shadow puppet world. Third, the description of information and performance texts that have been summarized and classified according to their characteristics (Mohajan, 2018) is then mapped according to a philosophical discipline approach that is by the research objectives that have been determined, and then the data is displayed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Previous researchers have widely researched shadow puppet performances, both in cultural science and philosophy. However, the results of the study on shadow puppet performances are primarily concerned with the problems of conventional performance norms that already exist, have not touched the puppeteers, the audience (especially the younger generation), and the values in shadow puppet that need to be actualized, both for the *dalang* and the younger generation of society.

This discussion is focused on the objectives to 1) Find the factors that influence the tendency of young puppeteers to express freely. 2) Finding the factors that influence the younger generation tend to like glamorous entertainment. 3) actualizing philosophical values in shadow puppets according to the present point of view.

Young puppeteers tend to express freely

On the one hand, the progress of society's civilization that is in line with the development of

technological culture and the demands of the creative industry is unavoidable; on the other hand, as a civilized and cultured nation, it is necessary to respond intelligently and appropriately (Ngafifi, 2014). The young generation is a product of the older generation; if now parents view the attitudes and civilization of the younger generation which are considered beyond the boundaries of moral norms, should parents only blame the younger generation? It can be said that it is unfair because parents are too quick to give a verdict without considering the cause. The attitudes and behavior of today's young generation are the reality of products that are born,

both from formal and informal education (Constantin & Labăr, 2009). Inheritance of knowledge, experience, and culture from the older generation occurs discontinuity. If in the past a child lived with his parents in a village without a television, without a smartphone and the internet. Every day they could hang out intimately with their father, mother, grandfather, and grandmother. Even when going to sleep, the grandfather or grandmother tells stories that provide role models for children, moral norms, behavior, and beliefs (Habsari, 2017). Thus, children at an early age have managed their mental development and intellectual growth.



Figure 1. The *Limbuk Cangik* scene, contains a lot of pop music offerings (Photo by Aris Setiawan, 2022)

Meanwhile, the younger generation that appears today in their childhood has not experienced their parents' treatment like that. Their parents are mostly professional people in modern society, busy with work every day. The children are only in the care of housemaids. At home, they are only faced with television, cellphones, the internet (Valor & Sieber, 2003). The parents leave for work early in the morning, and the children are still sleeping; when they come home at night, they are already asleep. When parents have time to hang out with their children, what's more, giving advice and examples in the existing local wisdom is impossible. As a result, children's mental growth and intelligence go wild at will because they are used to expressing themselves without control (Handayani et al., 2017). The view of modern culture is identified with the West; the understanding of Western culture for them is free as freely as possible. In Javanese terms, this is called *salah kedadén*, which is already wrong. It's

like rice has turned into porridge, so what are you going to do? Yes, it's because their gazes cannot be directed back backward. Therefore, the cultivation of cultural wisdom needs to be done for children from an early age (Rahmawati, 2012).

It must be admitted most of the young puppeteers that exist today are part of such a cultural product. Although, in general, the puppeteer is said to be figures of Javanese cultural preservationists, most of them have not yet arrived at a complete understanding of Javanese culture, let alone the art of shadow puppet performance. They put shadow puppet performing arts like pop arts in general. This can be proven in the appearance of vulgar and glamorous versions, which only tend to be entertained. For this purpose, three young puppeteers in Solo Raya were considered representatives, namely Ki Ihwan Susanto from Sragen, Ki Anom Dwijokangko from Karanganyar,

and Ki Wartoyo from Boyolali. These three young puppeteers have almost the same (similar) style of performance, namely the "creative, attractive and acrobatic" style of *pakeliran*. Audio-visually they can show creativity in working on *gending* (music) and working on *sabet* (movement of shadow

puppets), but the values conveyed can be said to be very thin. This is logical because the display of *pakeliran* is dominated by visual aspects, with acrobatic sabet, vulgar jokes, and popular songs, especially in the *Cangik Limbuk* and *Gara-gara* scenes (Yuniawan, 2007).

Shadow puppet with all their equipment is indeed art objects; puppet stories and plays are literary works. The puppeteer makes them come alive (Clara van Groenendael, 1987). The essence of these objects are values that can contribute to human life, both in terms of aesthetic, ethical, and religious aspects (Purwanto, 2018). That's why shadow puppet is

called an *edipeni-adiluhung* art, which is beautiful and contains a philosophy about the values of the virtues of life. This has always been seen as the unique art of shadow puppet performance, which has always been admired by many people but is not easily understood.



Figure 2. The puppeteer is playing the shadow puppet acrobatically
(Taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7hl2vtH9SA>)

The young puppeteers are now part of the generation of puppet enthusiasts, and it can even be said that they are lovers of traditional cultural arts. However, their love for their physical form or skin has not yet reached the psychological essence, commonly called *wewayanganing ngaurip* (life reflection by taking positive values). They view shadow puppets as playthings that can be treated as they wish. For example, the figure of a giant king who can flip repeatedly, Kartawarma and Seiyaki (a graceful knight) fighting acrobatically, and so on. The expression of the performance is considered to attract the audience and invites loud applause.

Even a young puppeteer from Sragen, whose popular name is Dalang Greng (Ki Ihwan Susanto),

in one gigantic *wadya budhalan* scene, is performed for more than an hour, only to perform his strange puppets, he said to only respond to the orders of the responders and the requests of the audience. He performed puppets on the screen, got up from his seat to talk to the singers and composers, and even performed puppets scenes with lewd expressions. This seems to them to be no longer taboo, even considered a trend of the times. This phenomenon is almost found in every shadow puppet performance by young puppeteers. This can be an indicator of the decline in understanding of moral norms due to their ignorance of the philosophical values of shadow puppets.



Figure 3. The strange shape of the puppet characters by the puppeteer, unique, often displayed for a long duration to attract the eyes of the audience. (taken from <http://wayangkampungsebelah.blogspot.com/2013/> and https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Gambar-4-Geoge-Bush-vs-Saddam-Hussein-pada-Wayang-Rai-Wong-Koleksi-Ki-Enthus-Susmono_fig1_328731638)

Based on this phenomenon and experience, it is deemed necessary to take steps from shadow puppets observers and puppet experts to socialize philosophical values in the world of shadow puppets, both through formal and non-formal education channels and the dissemination of "shadow puppet libraries" as general reading for children. Children are potential future generations who are the main assets in preserving and developing this nation's culture. Children's thinking power is like a white paper that has not been written on what our children will become; one of the determining aspects is the way we educate from the start. Elementary/junior high school-age children are likely to be relatively easy to teach and be directed to an object that is considered attractive. Children this age do not know much about what is around them. They are easily attracted to something that is felt closer to their world, both in form, character, and value contained by a particular object (Suyanto, 2015).



Figure 4. Sinden who appears standing up, dancing like a dangdut music singer, and not infrequently his movements are erotic (Photo by Aris Setiawan, 2022)

The audience (the younger generation) just watches glamorous entertainment

Shadow puppets are always alive and able to survive because they can adapt to the culture of their era. Although its journey undergoes various changes and developments, the actual value of art is always eternal in the community of its owner. These changes and developments are in line with the cultural views of the community, which are also constantly changing and developing (Nur Awalin, 2019). Therefore, the idea of value in the shadow puppet also moves according to the character and interests of the era. However, in the XXI century, the change in people's views on the art and culture of shadow puppets was quite alarming. This is possible

because of the shallow understanding of the community, including the puppeteer as the performer of the puppet philosophy value. Young puppeteers tend to present their performances as merely glamorous, with vulgar scenes filled in, either through expressions of *catur* (vocals) or *sabet* (puppet movement) in *pakeliran* (Soetarno, 2005). The audience also sees shadow puppet as just glamorous and vulgar, nothing more than that. As a result, the *edipeni* and *adi luhung* impression of shadow puppet is no longer visible; shadow puppet is seen as similar to other pop-art forms.

This can be said to be one of the impacts of cultural discontinuity. The disconnection of local wisdom from the older generation to the younger generation is increasingly visible, especially among the generation born in 1980 and below. The public still loves puppet shows, but the enthusiasm of the people to watch puppet shows has changed drastically. In the past, shadow puppets were seen as a spectacle and guide; now, most people see shadow puppet as mere spectacle (Winaja, 2016).



Figure 5. Western musical instruments combo bands are present in shadow puppet performances to accompany dangdut singers in the *Gara-gara* or *Limbuk Cangik* scene, often taking up the show's entire duration (Photo by Aris Setiawan, 2022)

The audience seems to no longer need complex puppeteer stories (*dakik-dakik*). They are only happy with the puppet displays at giant figures' attractive and acrobatic movements, supported by dynamic gamelan music accompanied by loud drums and cymbals. Even the strains of pop and dangdut songs entered the *pakeliran* with the singers standing on the stage. His favorite scenes are *Limbuk Cangik* and *Gara-gara*; requests for songs in this scene color them. The audience dances to the rhythm of dangdut, interspersed with comedians exploring sensuality so on. In this way, shadow puppets no longer look *edipeni* and *adi luhung* but as mere glamorous entertainment and an arena for artists to seek sensation in front of the audience.

Actualizing philosophical values in shadow puppet according to a contemporary point of view

The role of shadow puppet performances as a form of mediating space for moral education for the nation's next generation is seen as necessary considering that in the current era of globalization, it triggers the weakening of bonds of moral values, which results in a society experiencing a morality crisis (Turiel, 2002). This discussion leads to the disclosure of symbolic values in shadow puppet performances the importance of being understood by puppet observers, especially young puppeteers. Hence, the space of meaning emphasizes interpreting philosophical implications (Henry, 2013). The values that are interpreted are constellated with the world of education. Thus the results can be seen what moral values are still relevant for the world of education (Arifin, 2011), especially the needs of character education.

The positive values in the shadow puppet play are considered relevant for the lives of the Indonesian people. There fore, the study and dissemination of these values need to be carried out continuously (Dwijonagoro, 2014). The assessment and dissemination of these values are not only conservative. However, they need to be accompanied by innovations that still refer to the "spirit" of established traditional values recognized by the wider community and actualized according to the conditions of the era. Thus, shadow puppet is seen as a performing art and the values contained in it (Nur Awal, 2019). Understanding these values will contribute to the quality of life and human dignity, which will contribute to the formation of attitudes and character of the nation. To do that, a puppeteer must master the science of puppetry, which includes basic knowledge of *pakeliran*, wayang science, and puppet philosophy.

Basic knowledge of *pakeliran* includes elements of work, including *catur*, *sabet*, and *pakeliran* accompaniment. *Catur* is all forms of puppeteer expression through discourse in narration or dialogue of characters in *pakeliran*. *Catur* is the result of processing the medium of language and sound. *Catur* consists of *janturan*, *pocapan*, and *ginem wayang*.

Understanding culture is understanding the problems of meaning, values, and symbols used by supporting communities (Kayam, 2001). Then it will become a reference and guide for people's lives and as a symbol system, giving meaning, a model transmitted through symbolic codes (Saliyo, 2012). Likewise, the puppet is full of symbols and

meanings, and the perspective of Javanese culture is very thick in it. So shadow puppet is a symbol of the Javanese world, explaining more about the views of Javanese people in seeing, understanding, and behaving, as well as being oriented towards culture ([Seramasara, 2019](#)).

To understand and explore shadow puppet philosophy, it is essential to place the position of puppet within the framework of philosophical thought. As a result of eastern world thought, Puppet philosophy has characteristics, including the importance of harmony and harmony of life. Puppet exists in Java and Indonesia and is also spread in many countries. Indonesian puppets were recognized as a masterpiece of intangible world culture by UNESCO in 2003. On the one hand, this is an extraordinary award for Indonesia, but on the other hand, as Indonesians, we need to think ahead about what to do with puppets. As puppet owners, we need to understand the values of puppets. Through understanding these values, people will realize how important the values in the shadow puppets are for life now and in the future ([Sunardi et al., 2018](#)).

One of the suitable approaches to understanding puppets is through philosophy. The world sees Indonesia as rich in arts and culture ([Sugiyarto & Amaruli, 2018](#)). In this era of globalization, one of the assets that can be promoted is cultural products; one of the traditional cultural products still favored by the wider community is the shadow puppet ([Desriyanti, 2017](#)). The commitment of all nations to the noble values of puppets requires real consequences from the ethical and moral aspects of the Indonesian government, which the world knows as the nation that owns the art of puppets. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has given the title and proclaimed that shadow puppet is seen as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This is not just a gift of respect. Still, it is a motivation for the Indonesian people to introspect and hope what will be done for the future to create values in shadow puppets that are more beneficial to human life.

Entering the era of globalization, all human beings need to be aware of the continuity and integration between various nations. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the integral relationship between spiritualism and religion with art-culture and science-technology. This is useful as development capital in the current era to create a peaceful and prosperous atmosphere. The fact shows that the strength of a society or nation is supported

by three main pillars, namely religion, culture, and works (science and technology). Inside the building of a puppet show, there is a systematic lesson in the principles of building concepts through a holistic approach and implementing its applications through integrated efforts or networkings. Thus, the shadow puppet deserves the title of *adhiluhung* because it has displayed a unified and harmonious system of integrity.

CONCLUSION

The young puppeteers are now part of the shadow puppet enthusiasts and even lovers of traditional cultural arts. However, their love has not yet reached the psychological essence, commonly called *wewayanganing ngaurip*. So it is not impossible to present shadow puppet performances with free expression—the audience views puppets as just glamorous and vulgar and nothing more. As a result, the edipeni and noble impression of shadow puppets is no longer visible, wayang is seen as similar to other popular arts.

Understanding the values in shadow puppets will contribute to the quality of life and human dignity, which will contribute to the formation of attitudes and character of the nation. To do that, a *dalang* must master the science of puppetry, which includes basic knowledge of *pakeliran*, shadow puppet science, and puppet philosophy. Thus, the shadow puppet performance is undeniably a reference (reference of life) in the view of the Javanese people. The puppet with various dynamics of the play presented is a cycle of values that are always actualized as the maturity of the puppeteer who speaks and tells the story. Puppet shows are indeed a place to reflect and constantly introspect to control our lives so that they are not far from the values and norms of life outlined by Javanese society in general.

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