



## The Existence of Purbo Asmoro Puppeteers in the Digital Era

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to describe the existence of puppeteer Ki Purbo Asmoro in the digital era. The method used in exploring this is using library research, in the process of collecting information and obtaining data is done by reviewing notes, books, journals, documentation, and other sources that may be relevant to the topic of the article written. The results of the analysis carried out regarding the existence of puppeteer Ki Purbo Asmoro in the digital era are 1) The condition of shadow puppetry in Solo is quite good, which has the support of the government in terms of funding facilities, training, and infrastructure. 2) The survival of shadow puppetry includes factors such as the innovation and creativity of puppeteers in the face of globalization, namely the development of puppeteer Ki Purbo Asmoro's innovation in the development of the wayang style in his performances. Pakeliran garapan wayang style is a new packaging concept in an overnight format. Social media plays an important role for Ki Purbo Asmoro in developing the existence of shadow puppet culture, namely through the Purbo Asmoro Official YouTube channel. Through his YouTube channel, it contains educational values regarding puppet knowledge. 3) The main elements of the work culture ecosystem include: encouraging innovation and creativity in helping to organize puppet shows that are relevant and adapt to change. 4) The positive impact of the existence of puppeteer Ki Purbo Asmoro is to increase public interest in puppet culture from an early age in the younger generation. Education and learning about puppet content. Social media becomes a forum that makes it easier for puppet artists to organize various plays, knowledge in puppet shows. Inspiring the younger generation in encouraging young people to develop an interest in wayang art to be used as learning.

**Keywords:** *Ki Purbo Asmoro; Existence; Puppeteer; Wayang*

### **Introduction**

The people of Indonesia, especially on the island of Java, have known the art of wayang<sup>1</sup> for a long time. Puppets include wayang golek, wayang orang, wayang suket, and wayang kulit. The meaning of wayang kulit or wayang purwa is a puppet made of leather, which is a picture or imitation of a human

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<sup>1</sup> An imitation of a person made of carved leather or wood and so on used to portray a character in a traditional drama performance.

being used to perform a play<sup>2</sup> or story. Wayang kulit or purwa is a symbol of human life in this world (Hardjowirogo, 1989). A person who plays a puppet is called a dalang. Javanese people consider the art of wayang not only as a spectacle but also to commemorate the events of life from birth to death (Sarwanto, 2008).

Wayang kulit is one of the important arts to be preserved. In a performance a play or story provides values, moral messages of human life. With the growth of various types of puppets in Indonesia, it is a gift for the next generation (Suswandari, 2021). Young people are expected to be able to maintain the existence of Wayang in the current era. According to Laksono, wayang is a sacred religious myth, thus making the reasoning of the Javanese people who consider the existence of wayang universally a realization of Javanese knowledge about the universe (Laksono, 1953).

The emergence of technology has made it easier for young people to access information, science, culture and the arts. In terms of art, the development of wayang performances in Java is less attractive to young people. The influx of Korean Pop culture, Wibu (*Japanophilia*) is one of the factors in the declining interest of young people in the traditional art of wayang. So that the art of performing this puppet culture began to fade.

The era of globalization can affect the traditional culture of a nation, due to the entry of other cultures into a nation. The emergence of the development of information technology expands the culture of other nations through social media, resulting in the influence of cultural change (Larasati, 2018). The phenomenon of globalization is an important concern that foreign cultures are more attractive to young people than their own traditional culture.

The younger generation has begun to overlook wayang as one of the most underrated cultures. Therefore, a strategy is needed to preserve and maintain the existence of wayang in the current era. Existence can be interpreted as a visible existence that distinguishes one object or object from another object or object. According to Poerwadarminta, existence has the meaning of presence or existence (Poerwadarminta, 1998). The idea is reinforced by Watloy's opinion that existence is a kind of existence that is a "human characteristic" that understands the nature of human beings (Watloy, 2001). Description of the understanding of an individual's existence in this world. Existence is also called existence, with the understanding that there is an influence on the existence of something that is attempted (Andriani & Ali, 2013).

In relation to maintaining the existence of wayang culture, there is a puppeteer artist in Central Java, precisely in Surakarta named Purbo Asmoro born in Pacitan, December 17, 1961. Born into a family of puppeteers, then studied at the Indonesian Karawitan High School (SMKI) Surakarta, and continued his studies at the Indonesian Karawitan Academy of Arts in 1986, and studied for a Masters in Performing Arts Studies UGM in 2002. He then taught at the Indonesian Institute of Arts Surakarta in the department of puppetry. Ki Purbo Asmoro's journey in the art of puppetry, obtained achievements including 1st place in the Central Java Dalang Competition in 1992, the featured puppeteer of the Greget Dalang Festival in 1995. Puppeteer tour performances in various countries such as France, Japan, America, and others.

Departing from this, in this case it will explore further related to the puppeteer Purbo Asmoro, so the formulation of the problem is as follows (1) What is the condition of puppetry in the current era? (2) How does puppeteer Purbo Asmoro maintain the existence of puppetry in Surakarta? (3) How does Purbo Asmoro build a work culture ecosystem with his behind-the-scenes team? (4) How is the influence of the existence of Purbo Asmoro's puppeteers through social media?

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<sup>2</sup> A series of events related to a puppet character performed in one performance.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Condition of Puppetry in the Current Era

Wayang is a culture that has been recognized by the *United National Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) on November 7, 2003. Wayang is a performance by a puppeteer through the art of storytelling (Shalifah, 2022). The stories and characters in shadow puppets can be likened to the behavior of human life in the universe. The puppet stories contain guidelines for life. According to Sumarsih, stories and characters in shadow puppets describe human character and behavior in life (Sumarsih, 1981).

The function and role of shadow puppets is the identity of the Javanese people. The form of shadow puppets is a unique depiction of the Javanese way of life (Kayam, 1984). Javanese people identify themselves with puppet characters who have noble traits. Wayang stories contain the value of life to humans, in order to have a noble personality (Solichin, 2011). Based on clarification and type, the number of shadow puppets in one box can be divided into several groups. Based on the way of arrangement in the performance, it is divided into three groups, namely *Wayang Panggungan*, including *Wayang Sempingan kanan* and *Wayang Sempingan kiri*, *Wayang Dhudhahan*, and *Wayang Ricikan* or *Wayang Tutup* (Subagya, 2013).

#### a. Wayang Panggungan

In general, 60 puppets are produced. These puppets are used to decorate the stage. Some puppets are placed in the puppet box and some are placed in the puppet box on the right side of the puppeteer during the performance, which has been arranged according to certain rules. *Wayang panggungan*, also called *wayang sempingan*, are puppets arranged in a row on the stage debog. *Wayang panggungan* is divided into right-sided and left-sided *wayang sempingan*. The position of the puppets is located behind the scene. Things that need to be considered in arranging the puppets are setting the height and lower position of the puppets, and arranging the puppet faces.

#### b. Right Symbol Puppet

The *right side puppets* are a group of puppet characters with good characters. It consists of wayang kings, wayang ksatria, wayang putran, wayang putren, and wayang bayi.

#### c. Left Hook Puppet

The *left side puppets* are a group of puppet characters with evil characters. Includes giant king puppets, boma puppets, knight puppets, putran puppets, Sasran puppets. The function of wayang sempingan is to help the smooth running of the pakeliran, decorating the artistic support stage.

#### d. Dhudhahan Puppet

*Wayang dhudhahan* is a group of puppets that are arranged and stored in puppet boxes during performances. The puppet characters in *wayang dhudhahan* include: giant puppets, puppets of the gods, puppets of wanara (apes) and their soldiers.

#### e. Wayang Ricikan

*Wayang Ricikan* is also known as *wayang eblekan*. *Ricikan puppets* include: animal puppets, wayang gunung and weapon puppets (Subagya, 2013).

## 2. Dalang Purbo Asmoro Maintaining the Existence of Pewayangan in Surakarta

During the pandemic, it became a phenomenon that artists or art workers experienced a lack of jobs. The pandemic has limited various activities that invite the masses. This factor is important for the termination of performances such as karawitan<sup>3</sup>, keroncong<sup>4</sup>, dance<sup>5</sup>, campur sari<sup>6</sup>, and wayang kulit. On the other hand, the economic conditions of the artists and their supporters such as *crew*, *soundman*, *lighting*, *videographer* are reduced. Therefore, the emergence of this phenomenon made Ki Purbo Asmoro try to make wayang performances able to survive in any situation. Ki Purbo Asmoro's idea of a single wayang performance was an idea of concern for wayang culture during the pandemic (Nugroho, 2021).

The concept of pakeliran<sup>7</sup> Surakarta style includes three groups, namely *overnight pakeliran*, *concise pakeliran*, and *dense pakeliran*. However, the performance of wayang tunggal pakeliran is not in the Surakarta style pakeliran arrangement so that this innovation idea was born in the puppeteer Ki Purbo Asmoro. An overnight pakeliran is generally performed from 9pm to 4am. The compact pakeliran is shorter in duration than the overnight pakeliran. In this compact pakeliran, the performance is specific to both the storyline and the play (Sudarko, 2003). The model of pakeliran arrangement in the solo puppet play Lakon Sudamala has a certain systematic to observe. Through this phenomenon, analysis leads to the elements of work and art experience (Sunardi, 2012).

On Purbo Asmoro Official's YouTube channel, there are educational values regarding puppet knowledge, among others:

- a. Knowledge of wayang kewanan: in this case, Ki Purbo Asmoro tells us about wayang kewanan in *ebleg*<sup>8</sup>, usually placed to the right of the puppeteer. There are also dhudhahan puppets, puppets that are not placed on the right or left side of the puppeteer.



Figure 1: Wayang Kewanan.  
(Source: Purbo Asmoro Official, 2023)

- b. Puppet bracelet knowledge: in the art of shadow puppetry, there are several kinds of bracelets worn by puppets. But in general there are other forms placed on the strata of the bracelet character in the selection. Ki Purbo Asmoro holds the Pragota puppet character.

<sup>3</sup> Indonesian traditional music that uses gamelan instruments.

<sup>4</sup> The art of music is native to Indonesia, especially in the technique of playing patterns. However, the instruments were influenced by the Portuguese.

<sup>5</sup> Human gestures are expressions of the soul that create beauty and meaning.

<sup>6</sup> An Indonesian popular music genre that is a blend of traditional Javanese music and modern music.

<sup>7</sup> The art of wayang performance.

<sup>8</sup> A place to organize the puppets, either the puppets that will be played or the puppets that are in the box.



Figure 2. Knowledge of Wayang Bracelets  
(Source: Purbo Asmoro Official, 2023)

- c. Knowledge of various kinds of puppet inlays: Usually what is seen is a titi or a sign of a small hole. The nuances of the object and the behavior of the inlay and the style of the inlay are what make the characteristics.



Figure 3. Knowledge of Various Inlays.  
(Source: Purbo Asmoro Official, 2023)

- d. Puppet appreciation: Ki Purbo Asmoro's performance was watched by children from 42 countries. Assisted by Kitsie Emerson.



Appreciation of Wayang by foreigners.  
(Source: Purbo Asmoro Official, 2023)

Ki Purbo Asmoro met Kitsie Emerson, who at the beginning of their meeting discussed karawitan, gamelan and wayang. Until Kitsie made observations about the world of wayang and could translate the puppeteer's dialogues including his improvisations. Kitsie has succeeded in making innovations to all the gaps in cultural backgrounds, language differences, experienced by foreign audiences when watching puppet shows, so that it is no longer an obstacle to understanding the course of the puppet story. The collaboration or cooperation between Ki Purbo Asmoro and Kitsie can elevate the

art of wayang to be in demand. Many foreigners are interested in wayang performances, partly because they generally like wayang as a whole. Starting from the strength of the story, gamelan, kebyolan and sabetannya (how to play puppets). Ki Purbo Asmoro puppeteers with an innovative classic concept, in an interesting and classic performance. The elements can be developed as needed, especially moral and educational values. On October 25, 2023, he held a wayang improvisation workshop, introducing a new breakthrough in wayang performance with English translation packaging. Kitsie adapted the speech flow of Ki Purbo Asmoro's puppeteer language with English writing. This makes foreigners able to understand the storyline or puppet play that has been performed.

The puppeteer manages the narrative, the conversation displays the characteristics of the puppet character, regulates the use of language (*antawacana*) and sound, as well as the style of movement (*sabet*). A puppeteer is able to present the main messages containing guidance for the audience through a series of plays performed (Emerson, 2017). Classical style Pakeliran has a broad interpretation. It can be interpreted as following the rules that have been used through a certain learning. Humardani states that "for the time being, the form of pakeliran in question can be called "new pakeliran" only. There are some who call it "short pakeliran"; others call it "four-hour pakeliran" or "five-hour pakeliran". These names do not essentially refer to the underlying notion or idea. The new pakeliran is not just short, in the sense that the time is short or there is a tone of "abbreviation of ...," but rather "ulur," that is, not too short and not too long but "dense" in content. If "new pakeliran" is called "short pakeliran," it is the same as calling the form of an all-night pakeliran "long pakeliran." As for the name "pakeliran four or five hours," this is ahead of reality, because not every work of "new pakeliran" is four or five hours long. The time duration of the "new pakeliran" depends on the content, storyline, form of work, and packaging of the puppeteer in each play.... What needs to be emphasized here is that pakeliran forms with a shorter time duration (between one and five hours) are not simply called "new." What is new or not new is essentially not determined by the form that appears to be new, but by the underlying views or ideas" (Humardani, 1991).

Pakeliran can be interpreted as a form of stage packaging in a shadow puppet show. According to Murtiyoso et al, pakeliran wayang aims to stabilize the atmosphere, strengthen the feeling, and beautify the atmosphere (Murtiyoso, 2007). In the presentation of the puppet stage has the concept of *garap pakeliran*, three elements are *chess*<sup>9</sup>, *sabet*<sup>10</sup>, and *karawitan pakeliran*. The wayang performance furniture is usually divided into two categories, namely, physical furniture and non-physical furniture. Physical furniture includes gamelan, pengrawit, puppets or can be interpreted that can be seen through the naked eye. Non-physical furniture includes *chess*, *sabet*, pakeliran music (Sunardi, 2013).



Expressive *kayon* movement, Purbo Asmoro, Gadjah Mada University, Dec 2015  
(Source: photo by Djajusman)

Wayang performances tell about plays. Lakon in the Javanese dictionary means story (Sudarmanto, 2016). The preparation of wayang plays through puppeteers has been adjusted to an agreed

<sup>9</sup> All forms of language or discourse spoken by in the pakeliran.

<sup>10</sup> The movement and appearance of the puppets in front of the screen played by the puppeteer.



concept. Quoted from Rukiah, lakon is equivalent to drama (Rukiah, 2020). In shadow puppet performances, this play can be an episode from the Mahabarata or Ramayana stories, legendary stories, and modern stories that combine traditional elements. Through the performance of a play, human values will be revealed that can be contemplated (Kuwato, 2001). Ki Purbo Asmoro's solo puppet play, *Sudamala*, uses one slendro barreled gender which is also played by the puppeteer. In addition to the concept of form and play, there is also *sabetan*, which is understood as a visual representation of the puppet movements performed by the puppeteer during the puppet performance (Sunardi et al., 2019). The concept of *tunggal* can be interpreted as one, so that there is only one performer in the performance. Ki Purbo Asmoro said that the selection of gender instruments can express the whole idea in working on the *pakeliran* and can support the atmosphere of the puppet scene. The shape of the puppet character not only describes the character but also describes the character (Suwarno & Haryono, 2014).



Figure 6: Ki Purbo Asmoro becomes a puppeteer and plays the gender in the Single Puppet play *Sudamala*

(Source: Nugroho, *Lakon Journal of Wayang Studies & Creation*, 2021, page 6)

In wayang performances there are educational values that can be used as guidance for fans or spectators of wayang. In puppet shows, among others:

- a. **Moral Value:** Wayang often contains strong moral messages. The stories in puppet shows can teach values such as honesty, integrity, heroism and kindness.
- b. **Ethical Values:** Puppets promote ethical values in the actions and behaviors of the characters. Viewers can learn about good and bad actions, and their consequences.
- c. **Social Awareness:** Puppets can raise social awareness by raising social, political or economic issues in their stories.
- d. **Care and Empathy:** Puppet shows can help build empathy and compassion for the characters and situations in the story.
- e. **Tolerance and Diversity:** Puppets often present a variety of characters from different walks of life and backgrounds. This can teach tolerance, respect for diversity, and an understanding of unity in diversity.

### 3. Purbo Asmoro Builds a Work Culture Ecosystem with His Behind-the-Scenes Team

The work culture ecosystem is what describes the entire environment including elements that influence the way of working, values and norms in an organization. It includes the cultural aspects of the organization, and the goal is to create a productive and positive work environment. The main elements of the work culture ecosystem:

- a. **Innovation and Creativity:** A culture that encourages innovation and creativity can help an organization to stay relevant and adapt to change. This includes providing space for experimentation and development of new ideas.

- b. Communication: Effective communication is the foundation of a good work culture. Clear information delivery, open communication channels and constructive feedback are essential in creating a transparent and connected work environment.
- c. Leadership: Organizational leadership plays an important role in shaping work culture. The leader's leadership style, vision, and values have a major impact on how employees respond to and participate in the work environment.
- d. Organizational Culture: Understanding the values, norms, and beliefs that an organization maintains. This culture reflects a unique identity that can influence how employees interact, work and collaborate.
- e. Equality and Fairness: An inclusive and fair work culture is an important goal. Ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and have equal opportunities is essential in a healthy work culture ecosystem.

A good work culture ecosystem achieves the goal of maintaining and creating a comfortable and productive environment that can later enhance organizational development and changes in the organizational environment.

Ki Purbo Asmoro's puppet show is certainly inseparable from the help of parties, including *soundman*, *videographer*, *lighting* and so on. Among these parties are Ki Purbo Asmoro's two sons named Indhung Prabancana and Kukuh Indrasmara. They are the ones who help Ki Purbo Asmoro in the existence of his father's puppet show. Kukuh created the Purbo Asmoro Official YouTube channel so that puppet fans can access Ki Purbo Asmoro's content. By forming the Dewan Kinting Kintak organization, it aims to help smooth activities such as streaming Purbo Asmoro Official YouTube behind the scenes.

#### 4. The Effect of Dalang Purbo Asmoro's Existence through Social Media.

As technology develops, social media is currently widely used by the public. The reason social media is currently very popular is because social media makes it easier for users to express themselves such as: expressing opinions, experiences, and feelings through creative ways (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Social media can be used as a means to promote a product, tourism industry, and certain services (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013). According to Mukhadis, the value of character education displayed on puppet characters forms human resources with a *kaffah* dimension<sup>11</sup>, in the sense of having character in the field of technology. The virtues of human resources with *kaffah aspects*, as a guideline for facing the global era, include pious aspects, superior capacity, independence of thought, ability to emulate and respect themselves, long-term learning, and *spiritual* awareness (Narimo & Wiweko, 2017).

The positive impact of Ki Purbo Asmoro's puppeteer existence on social media is:

- a. Increase public interest in wayang culture from an early age in the younger generation.
- b. Make it easy for people to access through the Purbo Asmoro Official YouTube channel.
- c. Promotion and preservation of culture, through social media the art of Indonesian puppetry can be recognized by the global community and aims to help in preserving valuable cultural heritage.
- d. Education and learning, regarding content about wayang that can be used to facilitate online learning, sharing knowledge about history, culture, and wayang.
- e. Inspiring the younger generation, it can encourage young people to develop an interest in puppetry for learning.
- f. Social media has made it easier for puppet artists to share stories, knowledge, documentation and performances with their fans.
- g. Resilience in the digital age, by utilizing social media, wayang art can compete with other modern entertainment.

<sup>11</sup> Absolutely all of them, without exception.



## Conclusion

Shadow puppetry is one of the arts that is important to preserve. The era of globalization can affect the traditional culture of a nation, due to the entry of other cultures into a nation, which has an impact on cultural change. Shadow puppet shows have a strong influence in art and culture. Wayang kulit is used as a means of telling stories of life lessons both moral and ethical messages for humans.

Social media plays an important role for Ki Purbo Asmoro in developing the existence of shadow puppet culture, namely through the Purbo Asmoro Official YouTube channel. The creation and editing of videos and content about shadow puppet knowledge is assisted by his two sons, Indhung Prabancana and Kukuh Indrasmara. With this behind-the-scenes teamwork, it is hoped that the Purbo Asmoro Official YouTube channel can inspire other puppeteers to preserve shadow puppetry culture. Providing education containing knowledge content, shadow puppet performances and being able to compete with other modern entertainment in the digital era, so that shadow puppets can maintain their existence.

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