

Intercultural Jakarta, Ambience of Betawi Theatre to Indonesian Theatre

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It is naturally taken for granted that the intercultural role of Jakarta¹ has opened opportunities for the development of contemporary Indonesian theatre and performing arts. We need to take into consideration some significant benchmarks of the Dutch colonial impact in the city of Batavia or colonial Jakarta such as the Asian cultural impact before discussing further. In particular, Chinese and indigenous Betawi cultures of Jakarta contributed to a collage of nationalistic expression in the arts, which formed a prologue to the embryonic features of Indonesian theatre expression. We must also acknowledge Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) and the Jakarta Arts Centre for showcasing and exposing artists to all these arts.

Jakarta is one of the most cosmopolitan cities of Indonesia and has existed for over five centuries. Because of its position as the capital city, Jakarta has played a significant role in the development of Indonesian arts. However, many people would prefer to rate other cities such as Yogyakarta and Bali as the cultural centres of Indonesia. Nevertheless, a study of the cultural context and history of Jakarta could provide a wider perspective for understanding intercultural relations in the contemporary performing arts of Indonesia and an alternative approach for the study of the development of new art forms and national culture in an intercultural global perspective. The intercultural ambience of Jakarta resulted in the rise of an indigenous Betawi culture which in turn nurtured the blossoming of the city's cultural life.

Background of Intercultural Process

A significant aspect of Jakarta's identity, often avoided by anti-colonial cultural commentators, is the fact that those 350 years of Dutch colonisation of Jakarta was a factor in cultural development. Another important step-up was when Jakarta became the capital of independent Indonesia. The city was now in an advantageous position to function as the centre of important cultural development. In a sense, the colonialism that preceded Independence, can be seen as an initial form of globalization in adapting cultural development to an outlook to the outside world (Yamashita 2003: 7).

Jakarta was the place where all the indigenous arts of the nation were brought together in prestigious venues and festivals to mark significant events which contributed to forming the cultural image of the country. As the nucleus of political activity since Independence, the city has become a centre of popular cultural development, and has proved that it is more susceptible to change and innovations than other regions of Indonesia. This made Jakarta well suited as an environment for the dynamics of the newly emerging culture, and it has progressed beyond that context to become a location for wider interaction between theatres of various cultures. The most important role of Jakarta at present is as the only "Indonesian city".

It is primarily in the metropolitan melting pot of Jakarta that Indonesia has developed and shown its creativity in the post-Revolution years. The energy has come from the immense influx of fortune seekers, especially from Java but also from the other islands into a capital where so much power and wealth are concentrated. Contemporary Indonesian also reflects the peculiar personality of Jakarta, its sense of solidarity, vis-à-vis the provinces and the brutal, commercial, power-oriented and cynical character of its everyday life (Anderson 1990: 142).

The cultural history of Jakarta has developed through intercultural interaction whereby its past and present depict a process of hybrid development from different cultures, from every point of the compass where different native-indigenous and foreign elements have come to interact and produce something new. This hybrid nature led to the formation of a “melting pot” of interaction to use Lance Castle’s phrase, between various peoples, century after century (Castle, April 1967: 153). Colonialism allowed the hybrid ambience to flourish for its own convenience. Once colonialism was removed and the full weight of westernisation was felt in Jakarta, this intercultural ambience brought about the rise of a new culture. Since Jakarta has become the centre of national life, cultural interplay has become even more complex.

Before ethnic identification became an important source of political strength in Indonesia and Jakarta, Jakarta embraced, absorbed and digested intercultural relations for more than three centuries of colonial rule. Independence created opportunities for new forms of cultural development.

The eventual recognition of Betawi culture several decades after Independence occurred during the rapid progress of urbanisation in Jakarta, which corresponds to “the globalisation of the local and the localisation of the global” (Nas 1998/2: 198). As the ‘gateway’ to development and progress, Jakarta provides a prime example for this issue. After all, it is where modernisation started, developing out of a necessity for a solid commitment to cultural heritage and ethnic roots, parallel to the adaptation of modern art.

It is essential also to consider the one sensitive issue of the relationship between religious convictions and the origins of urban Jakarta such as the role of Fatahillah, a Pasai-born man (Pasai is where the first Muslim kingdom in Indonesia, *Samudra Pasai* originated), who as the commander of a Muslim Kingdom at Demak, defeated the Portuguese in the 16th century battle at Sunda Kelapa, an ancient harbour in the region of Jakarta. This significantly emerged as an issue to counteract the image of a primarily westernised cultural development, which began

later in the 17th century and was seen to lack validity, particularly in connecting cultural Betawi to this heroic figure. The campaign for the recognition of the Betawi ethnic group might be seen as an attempt to give legitimate, uniquely ethnic roots to Jakarta. Islamic cultural development became a significant trend in the nationalist scheme, and later became a controversial issue in the hegemonic cultural controversy concerning Jakarta.

Interaction of different cultures, both within Indonesia and abroad, has propelled Betawi culture to become part of the more complex issue of post-war intercultural development. However, conventional historical research has pointed out that the socio-cultural environment that made it possible for the Betawi to evolve originated much later than the recognised formation of other ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Realising that the Betawi² were first recognised as an ethnic group in the census of 1930, Lance Castle described them as the indigenous “*Batavians*”, the largest ethnic group in the city at the time of the census.

Surjomihadjo wrote:

The mobility of this population group of Jakarta had been going on for more than four hundred years. The people originated from different nations; hence their ethnicity had changed from their original identity to a new ethnicity, the Betawi (Surjomihardjo 1976: 27).

Emerging from the colonial milieu to become the indigenous culture of Jakarta after Independence, Betawi culture also participated in the development of traditional heritage in artistic development in Indonesia in general. In addressing the issues of the evolution of Betawi art in historical Jakarta, it would be wise also to look back at the impact of colonial times.

Historical Impact of Colonialism to the Arts

Understanding the colonial setting of 17th century Jakarta is essential to the understanding of the history of Indonesia and the rise of the Betawi culture. It has particular relevance to contemporary arguments regarding cultural identity. This is related to the fact that the headquarters of Dutch rule in the archipelago, was called Batavia. However after Independence, Soekanto, an Indonesian historian, suggested that it be named Jakarta. Soekanto's nationalistic orientation was based on the heroic story of Fatahillah, who first gave the location the name *Djajakarta* (*Jayakarta*), or the victorious city, after he defeated the Portuguese at Sunda Kelapa.³

After Independence the name of the city was changed to Djakarta or Jakarta (in the new Indonesian spelling), as this was considered to be a more suitable name for the capital of independent Indonesia. The origin of Jakarta, if based on Fatahillah's victory, was on 22 June, 1527 according to Soekanto. Among historians, the change of name from *Sunda Kelapa* to *Jayakarta* still remains a controversial issue, as the validity of sources used by Soekanto is questionable.

Dutch Batavia presented a new kind of cultural development. Jean Taylor described how the social world of Batavia appeared as an entity of colonial society. Colonial culture evolved in response to the distance of the settlement from Europe and the tendency over time for a greater distinction between the European and the Eurasian or *Mestizo* components of colonial society.

Indonesian society of the 20th century was affected by the colonial culture and economic power of the Dutch especially after the large growth spurt in the archipelago in the 19th century. Colonial culture combined elements of the cultural legacies of Europe and Asia. It was the medium which Dutch and Indonesians came to know each other and interacted before Indonesian nationalism spread and brought an end to the rule of the Dutch (Taylor 1989: xx–xxi).

Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo (Surjomihardjo 1976: 30), in a study of colonial societal stratification, noted that from the colonial era until the end of the 18th century, Dutch officials formed the top echelon of the colonial society. Beneath them were the so-called ‘free people’ or *burgers* consisting of the *Mardijkers*, Christians from Portuguese India, the *Papangers* from the Philippines, plus those Japanese, Africans and Indonesians, who were Christians. Below them were the Chinese, Arabs, and people from various parts of India. After them, came the Malays and the non-Christian people – the majority of them Balinese – from other islands of Indonesia. Later, they included “indigenous” Muslims, who mostly came to be called the Betawi people. The majority were ex-slaves who had converted to Christianity and had been enlisted as soldiers, like *Mardijkers*, *Papangers*, Asian Christians, and Chinese. In the 19th century, most *Mardijkers* and *Papangers* were accorded the same level as “indigenous” people. In the early 20th century, three population groups were recognised by law: Europeans, Foreign Oriental (Chinese, Arab, and Indian), and *Inlanders/Indigenous*.

As early as the 18th century, the colonial records of the *Bataviaasche Plakaatboeken* noted that Dutch Governor-General Valkenier owned 15 slaves who were engaged professionally as musicians playing instruments like the flute, the drum, the triangle and the Turkish tambour. Interestingly, the records also show that in honouring local authorities like sultans and *bupatis*, the Governors-General presented them with musical instruments like violins, and trumpets (Batavia’s resolution on 2 October, 1731, and 24 December, 1731).

It was also in the 18th century that the Portuguese *Mardijkers* introduced *kroncong* music. About one century later the *Papangers*, who were colonial military migrants with strong links to the *Mardijkers*, developed a musical play called the *Tanjidor*, which was later adopted as a Betawi traditional art (Parani 1987).

In 1807, Dutch Governor J. Siberg authorised the performing of the *ronggeng* and *tandak* at indigenous wedding parties and at traditional ceremonies to mark the rice planting or *sedekah*

bumi. Daendels, the next Governor in 1809, issued a regulation re-instating the *ronggeng* dance school in the *kraton* of the sultan of Cirebon. The *kraton* had allowed the school to fall into disuse as it was unable to pay the maintenance cost. Because of the waning power of the *kraton* of Cirebon and the withdrawal of patronage, many indigenous art groups were forced to find a living in the western part of the sultanate, at a place closer to the more prosperous Batavia. Gradually this folk art intermingled with that of the other indigenous people of Batavia and made its contribution to Betawi traditional arts in the shape of the *Topeng Betawi*, which evolved from this merging some decades later (Parani 1987).

Patrons like Thomas Stamford Raffles, the English Lieutenant-General of Java (1812–1816), had 77 slaves of whom nine were musicians. Another patron during the reestablishment of Dutch rule in the 19th century was a rich Mardijker named Agustijn Michiels, whose slaves entertained him, and his guests on his Citeureup plantation near Bogor, south of Batavia. They performed a hybrid kind of music and dance, which displayed some influence from Western European chamber and military soiree music to indigenous local *wayang*, *topeng* and *gamelan*. After Michiels' sudden death, his family withdrew the patronage, a move that led to the diffusion of these arts as popular street entertainment in Batavia (Parani 1987).

The Batavia City Playhouse, the *Stads Schouwburg* (now the *Gedung Kesenian Jakarta*) was established or renovated by the Dutch Governor-General Van der Capellen at the place where his predecessor, Raffles, had a wooden theatre. It functioned as the main centre of entertainment for European society and was situated in the former well-to-do Dutch quarter of *Weltevreden*. The entertainment venue for Batavia, prior to this playhouse, was the *Herberg en Logement* (Public Guesthouse) located in present-day Chinatown, according to F. de Haan (1922).

During the 18th–19th centuries, many kinds of entertainment could be enjoyed by the citizens of Batavia such as reciting poetry and the recitation of scandalous stories, a genre similar to that of the European troubadours. Raffles moved the entertainment centre to *Weltevreden*, near the

present Pasar Baru. Having been rebuilt, the performing arts had a decent setting in which to present better standard artistic works. The *Stad's Schouwburg*, as it was then called, hosted groups from Europe performing Shakespeare, Moliere, Verdi and other famous classics. It marked a new beginning for performing arts of an urban Westernised nature in Batavia. To a certain extent, it also exerted an influence on the development of local, indigenous, and traditional performing arts as the indigenous local rulers who were often invited to attend these shows went away with ideas that they then introduced for their own entertainment (Parani 1987).

The 'Foreign' Chinese Impact on the Arts

The influence from foreign culture during the colonial era was by no means purely a Western phenomenon. Inspiration also came principally from the Arabs, Indians, and Chinese. The extent of Chinese influence in Indonesian cultural life has always been a subject of dispute. Even today, the Indonesian reformation movement gives the impression that the position of the Chinese element in Indonesian life still remains unstable and sensitive.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Toer 1998) called the Chinese *orang asing yang tidak asing* (foreigners who are not foreign). With these words, Pramoedya admits that the Chinese are foreigners who have become so familiar to Indonesians that they are no longer foreigners.

Indonesian contact with the Chinese began as early as in the 5th century. Early reference to it, can be found in the records of the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien and the Kashmiri pilgrim, Gunavarman (Wolters 1967: 35). During the Sriwijaya and Majapahit eras, there were friendly relations with China. The introduction of Islam to Indonesia did not happen completely outside the sphere of the Chinese. In particular, there were connections with the *Wali Songo* (Nine Apostles), still traceable in old places outside Batavia, like Gresik, East Java, just as remnants of Chinese culture can be still seen in *wayang* plays in several Chinese temples. In the Chinese quarter in Cirebon, West Java, the tomb of the *Wali Songo*, *Sunan Gunung Jati*, displays strong Chinese links.

Jakarta, during the Dutch colonial era saw population growth of permanent Chinese inhabitants. Records of the colonial period note that in 1641 Dutch Governor- General Van Diemen gave consent for a group to play Chinese *wayang* and to collect funds for the Chinese Hospital in Batavia. This was neither a European nor an indigenous artistic expression, and it is interesting to remark that this kind of performing art was the earliest of its kind recorded in Batavia, as found in the *Bataviaasche Plakaatboeken*.

The term *wayang* mentioned in the early Dutch records in relation to this Chinese theatre should be clarified. *Wayang* is a local native term, derived from Old Javanese meaning shadow or image. It was used to indicate an ancient theatrical play mentioned in the Hindu-Javanese inscriptions since the 9th century (Soedarsono 1984: 3). It is assumed that this Chinese *wayang* from the 17th century Dutch-Indies period might have been the kind of puppet theatre developed under the name of *wayang Po-Tee-Hi*. Moreover, many consider that *wayang Po-Tee-Hi*, which bears a strong resemblance to the indigenous *wayang golek*, had been influenced by the South Chinese *Po-Tee-Hi* theatre where puppeteers used linen bags as gloves.

Other Chinese theatrical arts performed included *koentauw* or martial arts, involving acrobatic plays with plenty of swordplay, clown acts and a Chinese orchestra with singing. This kind of theatrical play was very similar to what later became known as Chinese opera. These touring groups from China were very flexible. If there was no theatre, they played in an open field or in the street under a tent, or once in a while in the courtyard of a Chinese temple. They came from different regions of China and spoke their regional dialects in the play. Therefore the *Tio-Tjioe-Pan*, the *Kong-Foe Pan*, and the *Shanghai-Pan* were readily distinguishable from one another. Each troupe used different musical instruments which were performed by men and women. In the *Tio-Tjioe-Pan*, for instance, performers were of both gender which is most unusual, because in ancient China, women were not allowed to perform in the theatre, all the roles being played by male transvestites (Moerman 1929: 225–226).

In the 18th century, the Chinese Captain of Batavia, Nie Hoe Kong, promoted a new mixed musical orchestra of Chinese instruments, such as the *sukong*, *hosiang*, *tehian*, *gihian*, and *kongahian*, mostly known as the *er hu* instruments, accompanied by percussion. The performance would also include instruments from the *gamelan* such as the *suling*, *kecrek*, *kromong*, and *gambang*. Nie was not fond of *gamelan* music and longed for the music from China. This kind of musical expression became known as the *gambang kromong* and was adopted by the Betawi people as their traditional music. It accompanied the *lenong*, or traditional theatrical plays, which featured the *cokek* dance. *Cokek* may be a derivation from the Hokkien word *Tjio Kek*, which means singer (Parani 1987).

Some believe that the *lenong* theatre itself might derive from the Chinese drama of the traditional *Kuan Han-tjing*. New popular theatrical entertainment, such as the Surabaya *komedi stamboel* and the *bangsawan* of Malaya which developed in the urban environments of the archipelago, had also been infiltrated by various local, native flavours.

The *gambang kromong* and the *cokek* dance contain what is considered as a traditional Betawi dance known as *Si Pat Mo* after a Chinese song of the same name. According to Pramoedya Ananta Toer, it means the “18 Caresses”, which can clearly be traced to Meme Krawang *Cokek* dance vocabulary (Toer 1998: 20).

Chinese performing arts were usually performed during celebrations held in conjunction with Chinese New Year or on the 15th night of Chinese New Year (known as *Capgome*) and to some extent the Autumn Moon festival. Usually the locals joined in the merry carnivals that enlivened the boulevards of Batavia from Glodok (Chinatown) to such peripheral locations as Tanah Abang, Palmerah and Meester Cornelis, which lie in the west, south and eastern parts of present-day Jakarta. The carnival was often animated by music and dancing with theatrical plays like the *tanjidor* and *gambang kromong* musical plays, *cokek* dance, *wayang Sinpe*, and *Si Pat Moh*. The travelling street carnival looked like a folk celebration with *liang-liong* (the

dragon effigy) and *barongsai* (the lion dance). Children were important participants in this celebration. They played characters from Chinese mythology or stories from local Malay literature as well as *Bayan Budiman* from the *wayang Sinpe*. Sometimes, adults wore costumes from the Douglas Fairbanks' prewar popular film "The Mask of Zorro" when they joined in the carnival. Before the 1950s, these celebrations were very popular and widespread among the overseas Chinese and the local population also participated. For security reasons the Governor of Jakarta prohibited them in 1950.⁴

With the development of formal Dutch-Chinese schools in colonial Indonesia in the first decade of the 20th century, the *peranakan* (locally-born Chinese of mixed descent) had acquired some knowledge of Dutch and Malay. The variety of Malay that has become the Indonesian national language was very important in these theatrical presentations. It also flourished in the context of the development of *peranakan* literature. The golden era of *peranakan* literature is said to be around the 1920s and 1930s.

The writer Kwee Tek Hoay produced some plays, like *Allah yang palsu: Satoe lakon komedi dalem anam bagian* (The False god, a comedy in six acts) in 1919, *Korbannya Kong-Ek: toneelstuk dalem ampat bagian* (The Sacrifice of Kong-Ek, a play in four acts) in 1926, and *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* (The Rose Flower from Tjikembang) in 1927 (Suryadinata 1997: 206).

Recently this type of theatre has attracted the interest of academics, and has been revitalised by the playgroup of the Faculty of Cultural Studies of the University of Indonesia, who performed the *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* to a limited audience at the Dutch Cultural Centre in Jakarta in the 1990s. Despite such valiant efforts, its development stagnated, as it failed to compete with contemporary Indonesian drama, such as *Teater Koma*, which used a Betawi-styled but contemporary concept of Westernised theatre in some of the plays.

Jakob Sumardjo, Indonesian theatre critic, said that:

It was also a matter of national awakening, when Kwee Tek Hoay and Lauw Giok Lan introduced the idea that the *Indo-Tionghoa* and those Bumiputra intellectuals should pay attention to cultured theatrical plays other than the entertainment-oriented *Komedi Stamboel*, the *Bangsawan*, and others of their kind. Since the 1920s both had translated and written original plays in Malay based on the concepts of European theatre, which paved the way for the rise of Indonesian modern theatre. (Sumardjo 1952: 111–113)

Interest in the arts was not motivated merely by economic and industrial considerations. For instance, the close proximity of some ethnic Chinese in Central Java to Javanese culture, in both court and everyday art, also awakened interest in Javanese art forms. Some *peranakan* Chinese became very adept in the courtly cultures of Central Java, gaining an understanding of Javanese philosophy, music and dance. Others have been attracted to the modern Indonesian arts or to Westernised arts, and have made their contribution by becoming collectors of art works. Yet others are now modern fashion designers and artists, drawing their inspiration from many cultures.

Although this foreign influence has been a controversial topic in Indonesian life, the most significant product of the intercultural relations it fostered in the history of Jakarta was the rise of the Betawi arts.

Ethnic Setting for the rise of the Betawi Performing Arts

Historically, the Betawi people called themselves the *orang Betawi* (Betawi people). Saidi who quoted Sastradarmo, wrote that in 1865 they were designated by the term *orang Selam* (Islamic

people), but by the 20th century this term had fallen out of use and the term *orang Betawi* had become official. Earlier, they had been categorised as *orang Melayu* (Malays) as known to the Arabs (Saidi 1997: 14).

Betawi identity was only acknowledged as an integral part of the ethnic culture of the Jakarta region in the 1970s. Given the enormously important role a language can play in establishing the identity of any people, the recognition of the Malay used by the Betawi as a separate language was an acknowledgement of the status of this ethnic group as the indigenous people of the city.

Firman Muntaco, a regular columnist in the newspaper *Berita Minggu* from 1957–1965, wrote the “Gambang Djakarta” stories which portray humorous accounts of the daily lives of the Betawi in Jakarta. They proved to be a milestone to the formal recognition of the language. These stories became so popular that the colloquial speech became trendy and spread not only in Jakarta, but also all over Indonesia, in particular through artists such as the popular singer and film star, Benyamin. Chairil Anwar, the most popular poet of the 1945 Generation, also used some Betawi expressions in his writings (Saidi 1997: 16).

In the early days following Independence, Jakarta was not represented in the traditional performing arts exhibition held in conjunction with Independence Day. While Java has the *bedoyo* and *serimpi*, and Bali has the *legong* and *baris*, Jakarta was considered devoid of any indigenous traditional performing arts. However, during the anniversary celebration of the founding of Jakarta in 1973, a choreographer from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts and a member of the Arts Council produced a creative theatrical dance based on Betawi popular expression combining *cokek* and the *gambang kromong* in the *Plesiran* dance. It attracted the attention of the Governor and other important personalities while exposing them to the indigenous Jakarta-based Betawi culture. Since then, funds were made available for research, seminars, competition and workshops on the Betawi traditional performing arts.

A decade later, the Betawi traditional performing arts were paraded with those of other regions on the anniversary of Independence Day and at various festivals. Similarly, in the field of music, the famous *kroncong* genre became an essential requirement in national radio competitions, and the *gambang kromong* was recognised as part of the traditional musical heritage. Betawi *lenong* and performers became favourites on television programmes, appearing in theatrical presentations, comic intermezzos and popular television series like *Si Doel*.

Since the 1980s, the situation has changed through the creative process of the inculcation of expressions of the performing arts, which would seem to fit the notion of the ‘invention of tradition’.⁵ What transpired was not pure invention as its roots can be found in 19th century Batavia. It might be better to categorise this process as the ‘revitalising’ or ‘reawakening’ of traditional culture. The use of the word ‘invention’ is too radical in view of the wealth of evidence about some traditional forms of Batavia which were identified by European writers and scholars. Two of the earliest descriptions were given by Ritter and Hardouin in their books written in 1854 and 1872 respectively. For instance, the “*Tonelen uit het leven, karakterschetsen en klederdrachten van Java bewoners*” (Scenes from the Lives, Character Sketches and Costumes of the inhabitants of Java) mentions of a *Klein Maskerspel* (“Minor Mask” play as an alternative play to the so-called “Major Mask” and the *Wayang* play). Later L. Serier also referred to this *Klein Maskerspel* in his work on the *wayang purwa* in 1896.

An expert on Javanese classical literature, Theodore Pigeaud, wrote a comprehensive account of the popular performing arts of Java and mentioned the *Klein Maskerspel* in the *Batavia Ommelanden* as a street performance. In contrast to the *Groot Maskerspel* (major mask play), it was categorised as a performance pertaining to the courts of Cirebon, a city on the north coast of West Java. He also mentioned a popular performance called *Bantjivertoning* (transvestite dance performance), executed by two men, accompanied by instruments including violin, a drum, and a harmonium which originated from India. The Dutch called it a *draaiorgel* (barrel organ) play, accompanied by sung *pantun* (Malay quatrains). Jaap Kunst (Kunst 1973)

the famous ethnomusicologist, mentioned a *wayangan cokek* dance accompanied by *gambang kromong* instruments, and a *lenggo* dance accompanied by various instruments, which one was a Chinese moon guitar, played by Chinese *peranakans*; another was a *rebana*, a kind of Indonesian tambourine. In the early 19th century, Raffles (*History of Java*, 1817) mentioned *ronggeng*, a popular dance performed all over Java, giving precise references.

The *ronggeng* dance is mentioned in the Dutch colonial archives of the Cirebon district kept in the National Archives of Jakarta, in two documents, i.e. “*Herstelling van de School voor Ronggeng te Cheribon*” (Restoration of the School for Ronggeng in Cheribon) - 19 February, 1809 and “*Reglement voor de Tandak of Ronggeng Scholen en publieke vermakelijkheden te Cheribon*” (Regulation on the Tandak or Ronggeng Schools and Public entertainment in Cheribon) 30 April, 1809, issued during the administration of Governor-General Daendels. These were probably the *ronggeng* schools of the courts of Cirebon, which the court could not afford to upkeep, and for which the financial obligations were taken over by the colonial government. This is documentary evidence that the *ronggeng* dance of West Java was a court dance, but probably became a popular dance that was embraced by the Betawi (Parani 1987).

Certain remarkable personalities known by the writer during her research in the 1970s were pioneers of the Betawi performing arts. For the *topeng Betawi*, the major champions were Mak (mother) Kinang who passed away in the 1980s having been predeceased by her husband, Pak Jiun. In colonial Batavia, they were the major stars of the famous annual bazaar, *Pasar Gambir* or Market Festival at Gambir, a month-long celebration of the Queen’s birthday. They played popular legendary folk stories of the Betawi like *Si Pitung* (a *lenong* play on a heroic figure fighting colonial power) or *Jaka Pertaka* and *Sukma Jaya* in *Topeng Betawi* style (with the *Kembang Topeng* mystical figure) which remind us of the Panji stories (Probonegoro 1987). Today, members of their family have assumed the responsibility of preserving the heritage of the *topeng Betawi*.

The *lenong* theatre and the *cokek* dance have an interesting history and are good examples of art forms containing elements from the Indo-Europeans, Chinese, Peninsular Malays, and the Malays of the island and coastal regions of Sumatra and Kalimantan in Borneo. Related genres that preceded or appeared about the same time as the *lenong* included the *komedi stamboel*, *bangsawan*, *wayang cina*, *wayang sumedar*, *wayang senggol*, *dermuluk*, *mamanda*, to name but a few. These were local theatrical creations inspired by Western theatre as well as local, popular forms in an urban and commercialised setting. The performers played their own local legends or adopted stories from India, Arab countries, China, Western classics as well as contemporary movies.

The popular *komedi stamboel* of Surabaya and Batavia flourished from the last decade of the 19th century as so-called Eurasian theatre, and presented localized versions of Shakespearean plays. *Bangsawan*, a kind of theatre which originated from Penang derived much of its inspiration from stories like the famous “Thousand and One Nights” was also popular. *Bangsawan* displayed Hindustani influences derived from so-called *wayang parsi*. In Batavia, *wayang parsi* was known as *wayang Bombay*, but all traces of this genre have been erased, except for nostalgic photos such as those of the Dutch East Indies period found in *Oude Aanzichten in Batavia* (1950).

The most significant exponent of the *cokek* dance of the *gambang kromong* was the late Meme Krawang, who had a fascinating life. Born in China, she moved to Jakarta where she experienced the Japanese occupation, and later returned to China. She came back again to Jakarta and experienced the ethnic revival and national arts development following Independence.⁶ Considering the background of the *cokek* dance, in particular the *Si Pat Mo* which was accompanied by *gambang kromong* music, it is not surprising to discover that the *lenong* theatre might also have a Chinese origin. Even though many have chosen to forget this because of racial tensions, nevertheless, the artistic environment has respected this background and ensured that the art form has survived through education (Parani 1998).

The *lenong* theatre has such a unique background and it is favoured by the politicians in search of an example of indigenous art. It has counterparts in the greater Malay traditional theatres in several regions of the Malay cultural environment, as well as hybrid theatre in other places of Southeast Asia.⁷ In Jakarta, its pioneers, are Bu Sitti, and her late husband, who made *lenong* popular through legendary heroic stories like *Si Pitung*, and newly adapted Javanese – Mataram period stories like *Ki Ageng Magir*. The pioneers were aided by other leading stars like Nasrin, Toha, and Anen who filled TIM with full-house audiences in the 1970s.

From Popular to Indonesian Theatre

It is not uncommon to look at popular arts as a forum of support for the political activities that accompanied nationalist movements in Southeast Asia. As Craig Lockhard argues, popular art was a product of 19th century upheavals and societies in the wake of urbanisation, commercialisation and standardisation. Popular culture expanded exponentially with the invention of the mass media of communications technology (Lockhard 1998: 2–3).

Likewise, the Betawi performing arts developed during the early days of the nationalist movement (early 20th century) in colonial Batavia initially as a folk art. At the same time, entertainment in the form of popular theatre which had its roots in the popular Eurasian entertainment of the *komedi stamboel* emerged in the urban environment as a type of intellectual entertainment.

Komedi stamboel was a kind of popular theatre which mixed languages and a variety of theatrical concepts. At the end of the 19th century, the language of *komedi stamboel* still contained Dutch which was commonly spoken in the urban societies of Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and other colonial cities. The development of the *komedi stamboel*, influenced a new movement in theatre, known in the beginning as the *tonil Melayu moden* (modern Malay theatre). It was introduced by early exponents such as August Mahieu, with his “Opera la Mahieu” and later

on by T. D. Thio Jr., and Willy Klimanov alias Piedro (a Russian born in Penang) and his *Dardanella* group.⁸ In this popular theatrical genre lay the germ of Indonesian film which used a mixture of music, song and dance. The *tonil Melayu moden* prompted the rise of popular theatre groups such as the earlier mentioned *Dardanella*, the *Miss Riboet Orion* and many others. According to Boen Oemarjati (Rafferty 1989: 10–11):

This kind of Malay *tonil* did not contribute an ‘artistic theatre’ to the emerging Indonesian culture and moreover the colonial elite considered it as a low class form of entertainment. Willy Klimanoff /Piedro with his *Dardanella* group made a structural change to bring the Malay *tonil* closer to Western theatre production.

Dewi Dja, the East Javanese star of *Dardanella*, and Piedro’s *komedi stamboel* popular urban theatre, was a significant component in the development of contemporary Indonesian theatre. In 1935, she changed the name of the group to “The Royal Balinese Dancers”, while promoting Indonesia on a world tour. The group went to Singapore, where it established a temporary base, then to China, Burma, India and the Middle East, Greece, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands in 1938, and to New York in 1939. Dewi Dja undertook many cultural tours around the USA and Canada and returned to Indonesia in 1959. Later she went back to the USA several times where her group performed dances which were entertaining but more simplified in style. In a sense, she promoted Indonesian culture to the international world. The performances became instrumental to the aims of the nationalist movement because she could reach out to the common people through entertainment (Ramadhan 1982: 8, 123–175, 318).

Some of the performing arts created initially during the National Awakening of Indonesia were highly coloured by revolutionary emotion and were very anti-Western, particularly during the early years of independence. Many individuals expressed their opposition to colonialism through

literary, visual, theatrical and musical artistic expressions. Revolutionary themes appeared in poetry, short stories, novels, and some plays.

This was time when new theatrical pieces with revolutionary themes were written to incite strong nationalistic feeling. Since the Japanese Occupation (1942–45), artists had begun to break away from Western influences in the arts. A. Teeuw states that some of the artists who worked during the Japanese Occupation promoted collaboration because of the solidarity of the Great Asian Idea.

In this period of dependency, some cultural organisations were established in the framework of that solidarity, which benefited various artists. Some writers, who later became drama writers and cinematographers like Usmar Ismail (who made his first play and performed with the group Maya) paved the way for a new modern Indonesian theatre and a side career of Usmar Ismail and some of his contemporaries, play-writers as well as actors were lured away from the theatres to the more spectacular world of the movies. He became one of its pioneers, and later became one of the most outstanding Indonesian film producers. (Teeuw 1967: 110)

A group of intellectuals, including D. Djajakusuma, Surjo Sumanto, Rosihan Anwar, and Abu Hanifah supported the Maya Group which was founded on 24 May, 1944. This group was the forerunner of the ATNI (*Akademi Teater Nasional Indonesia*) Indonesian National Theatre Academy founded in Jakarta on 10 September, 1955, by D. Djajakusuma, Usmar Ismail and Asrul Sani. The Academy was important to dramatists like Teguh Karya, Wahyu Sihombing, Tatiek Malyati, and Sukarno M. Noor who were also influenced by Betawi theatre.

The rise of this Indonesian modern theatre was related to the previous entertaining theatre of *komedi stamboel*, *Dardanella* and the Miss Riboet

entertainment show. Some of the artists improved their capabilities for patriotic and more serious intellectual plays due to the progress of the development of the Indonesian language and literature (Sumardjo 1952: 150)

During the period of Constitutional Democracy between 1950 and 1959, debate regarding the direction of theatre and whether it should be based on Western or Asian theatre continued and was encouraged so as to pave the way for Sukarno's Guided Democracy. In the performing arts, it was a period that saw the rise of many Indonesian ethnic regional arts. By the late 1950s, a scholar remarked that modern drama was dead:

Playwrights had to look to regional performance tradition as a source of inspiration for the creation of new theatre styles that spoke to a broader public. In the late 1960s, playwrights began to use regional performance traditions, awakening public interest in modern drama. Rendra took a crucial step in the reshaping of Indonesian modern theatre when he began to experiment with elements from a number of Javanese traditions. Political changes have turned on the reverse in the New Order era. The use of elements from local forms would have become a respected strategy in the arts. This was due to a significant development happened in contemporary Indonesian theatre in particular and the performing arts in general with the establishment of the TIM arts centre in Jakarta (Teeuw in Rafferty 1989: 16).

When Indonesia entered the New Order at the end of the 1960s, new demands were made on the arts in general, including the performing arts. Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) – Jakarta Arts Centre was established in 1967. It was founded by the Governor of Jakarta, Ali Sadikin with the Jakarta Arts Council, Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (DKJ) to promote Jakarta's need for an arts centre to anchor the rehabilitation of the city and the revitalisation of the nation. During the initial years of the establishment of TIM, Umar Kayam (1978: 80) said that art needed patronage

from “maecenas” in the contemporary setting of Jakarta and in a wider context of Indonesia. DKJ and TIM should play significant roles as ‘bonafide’ mediators to the ‘maecenas’ in explaining why the arts must be perpetuated. In such a position, Kayam said that DKJ must work tirelessly to discuss with the artists the various possibilities and choices of creativity in the arts.

Contemporary arts were consciously promoted at TIM. Festivals combining traditional and contemporary arts were regularly organised. There were discussions on various matters concerning the arts in the morning and performances in the evening. Artistic groups from the regions were also invited to take part. There were Youth Theatre and Youth Musical Composition Festivals and many other arts activities.

The effort to build an Indonesian theatre has been very close to the nation’s development. The new theatre of Indonesia has become concerned with issues affecting the nation and as urban theatre has undergone various processes of acculturation. W. S. Rendra has exploited socio-political issues, paying special attention to the problems of the people since 1966. Arifin C. Noer depicts the little people from the big cities laying careful stress on the fact that they are the majority of the city. Putu Wijaya uses sounds, movements and spectacles as theatrical media to arouse intellectual response and emotion.

Many elements of traditional theatre, including Betawi folk elements have been borrowed by the interpreters of this kind of new theatre in Jakarta and they are joined by their counterparts in Bandung such as Jim Adhilimas and Suyatna Anirun.

Conclusion

While intercultural Jakarta has provided the ambience for contemporary theatres to flourish, intercultural Betawi theatre has influenced the development of Indonesian theatre. Pioneers in

Indonesian theatre who emerged during the Japanese Occupation, like D. Djajakusuma and Sumantri Sastrosuwondo directed Betawi theatres at TIM. These activities inspired the author to get involved too. Later on, Nano Riantiarno and his Teater Koma developed Indonesian theatre images of early 20th century theatre in a contemporary way. They presented plays like *Sam Pek Eng Tai* using Chinese-Betawi scenery and *Sang Prima Donna* in *komedi stamboel/bangsawan* style. More recently, a group of younger generation theatre artists who have been nurtured through the annual Youth Festivals, the Jakarta Institute of the Arts, and the Faculty of Cultural Studies of the University of Indonesia, have reproduced Kwee Tek Hoay's play, *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* employing Peranakan Betawi nuances.

The Betawi performing arts have also enriched and revitalised similar regional genres of theatre such as *dermuluk*, *mananda*, *bangsawan*, *lenong*, *randai* and the *ardja* in the local regions. The upshot is that these regional theatres became more varied, intertwining local cultural elements in their presentation.

As a nucleus of artistic development, TIM played an important role in promoting Betawi theatre arts and disseminating regional ethnic theatres from the archipelago. The new genres that developed are ambiances between traditional, contemporary and popular arts which have become the mainstream performing arts not only in Jakarta but in any intercultural cosmopolitan context.

Notes

1. Abridged version from chapter 4 of the author's dissertation: Nationalistic Culture and Ethnic Culture: Government Policy and Performing Arts in 20th century Indonesia , SEASP-NUS, 2003.
2. Husni Thamrin in 1923 named this group the 'Kaum Betawi', whom he represented in the Volksraad.
3. J. de Barros in *Decada 1777*, named it 'Xacatará', as noted by Adolf Heuken, *Sumber-sumber Asli Sejarah Jakarta*. Jakarta: Cipta Loka Caraka: 1999, 77.
4. James Danandjaja. "Perayaan Imlek dan Pesta Cap Gomeh. Suatu Folklore Betawi yang kini sudah punah" in *Jali Jali*, July 1983, pp. 34–35. This security was against the possibility of people disguised as players who were members of Karto Suwirjo's Darul Islam, a prohibited organization during Sukarno's rule.
5. Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989. Initially developed in the context of England and it was later applied to India and Africa.
6. Information obtain during research of the author.
7. For more information, see Ninuk Kleden-Probonegoro, *Teater Lenong Betawi: Studi Perbandingan Diakroni* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia: 1996), and Tan Sooi Beng. *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993).
8. According to Matthew I. Cohen's study, the inspiration for translating this theatre into Malay using European actors and European songs seems to have been Yap Goan Thay's or someone close to him in Surabaya's Chinese community. He was the owner of the company and exerted significant influence until he was bought out by Mahieu in 1894; Cohen, "On the Origin of the Komedi Stamboel, Popular Culture, Colonial Society and the Parsi Theatre Movement", in *BKI* 157, 2e. afl. 2001, pp. 329, 330.

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Photo 1 Betawi performance

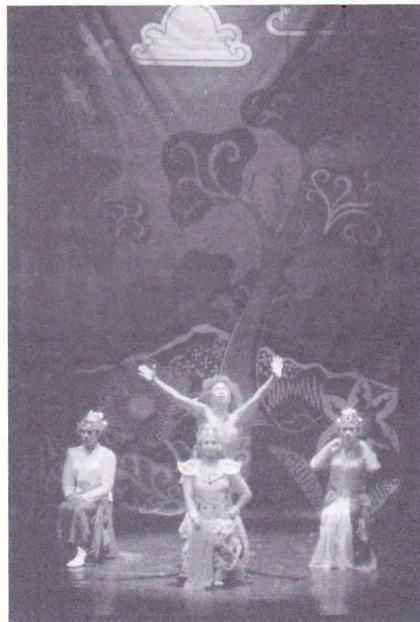


Photo 2 Teater Koma, *Semar Gugat*