

About Wayang Golek

Wayang Golek: A brief Introduction to my collection

Wayang Golek is the three dimensional rod-puppet theater of West-Java, an Indonesian province known as Sunda. It is a complex art form and a vibrant and popular part of the culture of Sunda. Wayang Golek continues to evolve and embraces not only the art forms of puppetry carving and performance, but also Gamelan Orchestra music, singing, epic story telling, as well as religion, mysticism and shamanism. A brief article below on this will give more information on Wayang Golek.

The two sets of Wayang Golek comprising my collection are both from the Bogor area.

The first set dating from about 1930 is extremely rare and has never been exhibited. Images are forthcoming.

The second set which was commissioned in Bogor 1991-94 has been exhibited several times at the Library of Congress as well as George Washington University, the Shirlington Artists Guild and the Embassy of Indonesia in Washington, DC.

The second set is available for exhibition and arrangements can be made by contacting me on the profile page on this web site.

The following is an article I wrote on Wayang in 1994.

Wayang Golek Purwa: An Introduction

by Walter O. Koenig

Surprisingly, very little written information is available about Wayang Golek Purwa, the classical Puppet Theater of West-Java or Sunda. Apart from the Dalang (Puppeteers) and the Carvers, very few people seem to know very much about Wayang Golek. Regardless of this Wayang Golek is very popular in West-Java. I will attempt to give a brief introduction to Wayang Golek Puppets. Is my hope to spark interest in this highly complex and very tradition rich type of Puppet Theater. Many areas of study are possible if one wants to get to know Wayang Golek completely.

These include, Performance Art, manipulation of the Puppets, Gamelan Sunda or Sundanese Orchestra, singing, story lines of the plays, etc. These different areas are what make Wayang Golek so interesting to study. The student can really never really complete the study of the subject and its related areas. It is impossible to do the subject of Wayang Golek Puppets justice in a few pages. A select bibliography can be made available for the reader whoa wants to seek out some of the books, articles and dissertations available.

The Origins of Wayang Golek Purwa

The word Wayang literally means shadow. Wayang usually has two meanings in Indonesian. It indicates both the Puppet Play and also the Puppets themselves. When most people hear the word Wayang they think of Shadow Puppets or Wayang Kulit. As a matter of fact, there are many different types of Wayang in Java. A few

these are: Wayang Kulit or Shadow Puppet Play, Wayang Wong or Wayang Orang which uses actors instead of the Puppets, Wayang Kelitik which uses flat wooden Puppets and Wayang Beber a type which uses Scrolls to narrate the stories. Wayang Golek refers to the three dimensional wooden rod Puppets and is most prevalent in Sunda or West-Java. Of the thirty million Sundanese who inhabit the western part of Java, most of the population lives in desa, or villages. It is here in the desa that Wayang is most popular. Research indicates Wayang Golek dates from about the sixteenth century with its origins in the north coast area of Java around Cirebon, Brebes and Tegal. Wayang Golek Purwa, using the old Purwa stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata cycles originally from India, dates to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The prototype Wayang Golek Puppets was based on Wayang Kulit Puppets. Until the end of the nineteenth century both Wayang Golek and Wayang Kulit were popular in Sunda and existed side by side. Then, progressively in the nineteenth century, Wayang Golek grew in popularity and eventually eclipsed Wayang Kulit. Wayang Kulit never had the degree popularity in Sunda that it had in Central Java and soon Wayang Golek became the dominant form of Wayang. One reason may have been the absence of courts to sponsor and foster the Wayang Kulit as was, and is still the case to some degree in Yogyakarta and Solo today. It has also been recorded that sponsors and audiences wanted to watch Wayang performances during the day, and for this reason Wayang Golek developed. This may seem odd as almost all performances, except shortened ones by apprentice Dalang for children take place at night. Regardless of its exact origins, Wayang Golek Purwa is the most popular type of Wayang Golek today, and its Puppets are the subjects of this introduction.

The original Wayang Golek Puppets were copies from Wayang Kulit Puppets and carving styles developed quickly. Soon several regional centers developed their distinctive styles. The Wayang Museum in Jakarta has identified the three main centers as Bogor, Bandung and Kerawang, though minor centers also exist. Some of these are Ciburu, Padalarang, Sumedang, Sukabumi, Cipanas and Ciampera, all in the central region of West-Java. The resemblance of Wayang Golek and Wayang Kulit Puppets continues to be remarkable with many Puppets, but there are also many differences. The most obvious difference besides three dimensionality of the Puppets is when we view a set of Puppets. A Wayang Golek set is relatively small when compared to a Wayang Kulit set, and typically consists of 50-80 different Puppets. Sets as large as 120 Puppets exist and upward of 170 different Puppets have been identified. Even though many Puppets have been identified, they are not frequently seen in sets. A Wayang Kulit set on the other hand may contain as many as 300 Puppets. Three very broad categories of Wayang Golek Puppets can be identified when thinking in the context of sets, these are: Puppets that are common to every set, Puppets that vary from set to set and Puppets that are pinjaman or borrowed Puppets that depict multiple characters. These borrowed Puppets may be used for dozens of characters depending on the Lakon or play performed. This borrowing process partly explains why there are fewer Wayang Golek Puppets in a set. Another reason may be their bulk and weight and the difficulty in transporting the Kotak or Puppet-chest to the location of the performance (An old set in my possession of 57 Puppets weighs more than 200 lbs.)

The carving of Wayang Golek Purwa Puppets

The carvers are the best authorities on Puppets as they rely on memory to carve them. No written sources existing are enough guidance for carving of the Puppets.

Recently, several books have appeared on types of Puppets and it remains to be seen what influence if any, they will have on the carving style of the Puppets. The carvers' main source for orders for Puppets comes from the Dalang themselves. The popularity of Wayang Golek Puppets among tourists has created some deviations such as the varnishing of Puppets to give them an "antique" quality. Cheaper imitations of this process involve the use of shoe polish. Also common is the painting of Puppets in black and silver, or other colors, to create for example matching Rama/Sinta sets. It is doubtful whether this will have an adverse effect on established styles at this time, though the evolution of Puppets continues. The

Puppets described in this essay are types actually used in performance.

Wayang Golek Purwa Puppets are about fifteen to thirty inches high. Each Puppet represents a specific character from the Ramayana and Mahabharata cycles of stories. (All Puppets introduced later on this essay, will come from the Mahabharata cycle, except for Radon Indrajit and Raden Hanoman who come from the Ramayana cycle.) Most of the Puppets are from the Mahabharata Cycle. According to Peter Buurman 90+ Puppets, versus about 15 for the Ramayana Cycle. The relation in numbers can serve as a guideline also when we compare it to the number of Lakon or stories. Kathy Foley identifies 30 Ramayana Lakon and 181 Mahabharata Lakon. As noted earlier however, we must remember that some Puppets particularly female characters are used interchangeably. The main Parts of a Wayang Golek Puppet are the head, the headdress, the torso, the arms and hands and the dress and ornamentation. Basically there are five main face types, and at least fourteen individual types. These five main types are: nobles, intermediate good and bad types, more aggressive and less refined types, Aggressive/Giant types and animal/special types. Later in this introduction we will look at eleven different types of Puppets in more detail.

Carving and assembly of the Wayang Golek Puppets is often a family affair, with different members of the carvers' family taking on different tasks. Usually, light softwoods are used for carving. These are usually cured and dried for one year or more before carving. Softwoods are easier to carve and lighter for the Dalang hold and therefore easier to manipulate in performances. First the head is carved. This process takes place in stages, initially roughly and then progressively using finer instruments, knives and sandpaper more finely and in more detail. The head is the most important part of the Puppet and the facial expression, the position of the head and the detail decide the value of the Puppet both from a performance and value perspective for the collector. Although the carving is most important, the painting of the head has to match the carving in quality. The head is first primed, usually in yellow. Next the color of the face is painted followed by the other colors in turn, with minute detail and/or gold areas painted last. While the carving of the head has taken place, the bodies and arms have been prepared to match the head. The dressing of the Puppets comes next. Most Puppets are dressed in a prescribed manner, though there seems to be great range in dressing as well. This is particularly true when viewing the Batik patterns. Some figures especially the clowns and ogres may be dressed in modern dress. Puppets dressed in gortex or leather jackets exist. An ogre (Buta Terong) in an antique set has Indonesian Domino Cards, western playing cards and the words "au gogo" painted on its head. The vast majority of the Puppets are

dressed in more or less traditional styles. Many Puppets have a sling on the back of their dress, wear a kain, and have the selendang or shawl, which is essential for performing Puppets of their type to perform dances and other movements. Also, most Puppets are decorated with sequins and many of them also wear pendants. To my knowledge there is no book available which concerns itself solely with the carving and dressing of Wayang Golek Puppets and this is a subject where a good guidebook would be welcome. When considering face color, generally speaking, refined characters have white faces, slightly more extroverted types may have pink or less commonly orange faces, coarser types have blue faces and rough to very rough characters have red faces.

Study of the main Wayang Golek Purwa types using specific examples

It is now appropriate to make a brief study of some of the main Wayang Golek Puppets. Though the number categories vary from source to source, we will look at eleven distinct varieties of Puppets. The Puppets used for examples were all carved in the Bogor style in 1991 and are currently part of my collection. Bogor style Puppets can be recognized by their high headdress and compared to some other centers of carving by their refined facial features. The titles preceding the names listed below have the following meanings: Raden = A noble title for a Prince, Prabu = King, Dewi = Title for Princesses and Goddesses, Resi = Holy man or Priest.

I. Raden Arjuna 23" high, face color white.

Arjuna type of Puppets is a noble with inclined faces, without mustache. This Puppet type sometimes carries a Keris (Dagger) and occurs in all sets. Arjuna is the third of the Pandawa brothers of the good party. Though not highly intelligent he is self-confident, friendly and cheerful. His voice is pleasant and his dialogue is usually brief.

He is adored by women and has at least twenty wives and many children.

Traditionally he is the hero of both the original Mahabharata and of many of the Wayang Golek Purwa Lakon.

II. Prabu Kresna 26" high, face color pink or less commonly black.

These types are gods or noblemen with upright refined faces. In contrast to the Arjuna type Puppets, these Puppets have light mustaches. This Puppet also occurs in all sets. Kresna is the advisor of the Pandawa and a friend of Arjuna. He is also the eighth avatar or reincarnation of the God Vishnu, sent to earth on a mission to fulfill the Dharma or destiny of the characters in the Mahabharata. He has many powers and his weapon is the discus or Cakra. He uses this only on seldom occasions. Kresna is attractive and intelligent and thus the advisor of the Pandawa. He can be dominant and can be very angry at times. His language is more aggressive than Arjuna's, though he is never rude.

III. Dewi Arimbi 24" high, face color white.

These types of Puppets are noblewomen with inclined faces. All noblewomen have slender bodies with slightly pronounced breasts. All wear a strapless bodice over the kain and all have white face. It is in this group and the next "Srikandi type group where a few Puppets are used for a great many roles. The greatest variety in this

and the next group are in the headdress. This particular Puppet has a full crown and occurs in all sets. Arimbi is the mother of Gatotkaca and the wife of Bima. She is the daughter of a Raksasa or giant and she has some magical powers.

IV. Dewi Srikandi 24" high, face color white.

These Puppets are similar to the previous group, the biggest difference being that in this case the noblewomen have upright faces and thus show a more determined character. This Puppet occurs in most sets and its headdress is of compact hairstyle type usually with comb and bird. Srikandi is the reincarnation of Dewi Amba, who in the beginning of the Mahabharata was killed accidentally by an arrow shot from the bow of Resi Bisma. In the Bharatayuda, the war between the Pandawa and Korawa, she avenges the death of Amba and kills Resi Bisma, the only person on the battlefield able to do so. Her character is serious and she is clear thinking. Her speech is clear and cheerful.

V. Resi Bisma 25" high, face color pink.

Puppets of this type have larger heads than the Arjuna or Kresna types. These Puppets also have a larger more pronounced nose, large eyes which may have red irises and a heavy mustache and beard. Puppets of this type may be gods or noblemen. Face colors in this group are always pink. This particular Puppet wears a wound headcloth or sumping, which can vary in color, either green or blue. Bisma is the son of Santanu and Dewi Gangga (the river Ganges). He is also the reincarnation of Prabsasa. When young his name is Dewabrata, but when taking a vow of celibacy he takes the name Bisma. He is loyal, honorable, intelligent and righteous. He is respected by both sides the Pandawa and Korawa and is a great warrior. Able to choose the time of his own death, which occurs at the hands of Srikandi in the Bharatayuda.

VI. Prabu Baladewa 27" high, face color pink.

This type differs from the previous type mainly in the fact that the head is held upright. These Puppets also have large eyes and a mustache and beard. The face color is always pink. This Puppet occurs in almost all sets and rarely varies. Baladewa is the reincarnation of Basuki, and he is the King of Mandura. He is also the brother of Kresna but serves on the side of the Korawa.

VII. Raden Bima 28" high, face color light blue.

Puppets in this category have large heads, a very pronounced nose, large eyes and heavy mustaches and beards. Puppets of this type are generally less refined than the previous types. Face colors vary widely and may be light blue, green, ocher or pink. A wide variety of characters both good and evil can be found in this category. There is also a wide variety of body color and dress. Our example Bima is naked from the waist up and always wears a snake around his neck. We also notice that he has long thumbnails or pancanaka. Bima is always larger than the other Puppets, but smaller than the Puppets depicting giants.

VIII. Raden Indrajit 27" high, face color red.

This type of Puppets differ from the previous group in that they have more hooked noses and that their teeth are often visible, thus showing even less refinement than the Bima type group. Sometimes fang like canines may be visible. Face colors are pink red or dark red and heads are inclined. Our example Raden Indrajit is a very

course and aggressive character.

IX. Raden Dursasana 26" high, face color red.

Puppets in this category have upright faces and have very aggressive looking protruding noses. Eyes also protrude and Puppets of this type also have fangs. Faces are pink or red. Puppets of this group are aggressive and unrefined types. Our example Raden Dursasana one of the Korawa occurs in every set and he wears cap with a headcloth. This Puppet varies from area to area. Dursasana is a very coarse and particularly evil character.

X. Raden Hanoman 24" high, face color white.

This category consists of monkeys or wanara. A wide variety of monkeys exist. They may have white, pink, blue, green, red, purple or gray faces and bodies. Several monkeys occur in all sets and our example Raden Hanoman the monkey general is one of these Puppets and from the Ramayana cycle of stories.

XI. Semar 21" high, face color white. This is the most difficult category of Puppets to define. Most simply put these Puppets have one characteristic in common. They do not fit into the previous ten categories. Characters in this category may include:

clowns, gods, priests, animals, knights, ministers, giants, villains and ogres or demons. It can be argued however that the ogres / demons can form a category of their own, but for the sake of simplicity I shall treat all "other Characters" as one category, because there other possible subdivisions as well. This category of Puppets consists of over fifty characters and a wide variety of colors, styles, dress etc. are possible. Our example, Semar a clown and servant of the Pandawa the good faction in the Mahabharata, occurs in all sets and is one of the most important characters in Wayang Golek. Semar is always black with a white face, because he is both male and female and represents both the day and the night. He wears a black cap and has a protruding brow. His body is stout and look deformed. Semar wears a medicine bag on his chest and his sarong is black. He has one tooth in his lower jaw and a bump on the back of his head.

Conclusion

In summary we have briefly touched on the origins of Wayang Golek, the carving of the Puppets and eleven different types of Puppets. It is hoped that this essay has been helpful for the reader to get to know the main categories of Puppets. A select Bibliography of Wayang and related fields follows. It is hoped that the reader will seek out some of these works. There is however no substitute for actually attending a performance and being part of the audience. The sights and smells and the excitement of the Puppet Drama can only then be really appreciated. As mentioned earlier, this essay is only meant as a very brief introduction to Puppet types them and the writer apologizes for omissions or errors.