

SHORTAGE OF SCULPTORS OF SHADOW PUPPETS' FACIAL FEATURES (BEDHAHAN) FOR WAYANG PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

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Bedhahan or the facial features of shadow-puppets play a crucial role in maintaining the quality of performances. However, the shortage of skilled practitioners in this field has raised concerns among artistic communities. The difficulty of finding proficient shadow-puppet face sculptors calls for thorough investigation and resolution of the problem, yet has not received adequate attention in earlier studies. Therefore, this study seeks to address two fundamental questions: (1) What are the reasons for the shortage of shadow puppet face sculptors?; and (2) What are the implications of this shortage for the world of performing arts? To answer these questions, this study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on a comprehensive case study that involves both the sculptors engaged in puppet making and the puppeteers. The research methodology encompasses a series of site visits and observations at prominent centers of puppet-making, followed by in-depth interviews with shadow puppet sculptors and puppeteer. Additionally, insights from community figures with extensive knowledge and experience in puppet-making processes and puppet usage are also incorporated into the research. The findings reveal several contributing factors to the lack of shadow puppet face sculptors. These factors include the demanding and intricate learning process, the need for sustained patience during puppet face sculpting, and the specialized skills required for this unique art form, which not all puppet makers possess. This study underscores the paramount importance of safeguarding the knowledge and expertise of shadow puppet sculpting, particularly *Bedhahan*, to ensure the preservation and continuation of puppet performances. The responsibility for preserving this rich tradition should not solely rely on society; it should also encompass the active involvement of relevant institutions. By addressing these challenges and promoting the training and appreciation of shadow puppet face sculptors, the cherished art of *Bedhahan* can endure, sustaining the cultural significance and artistic brilliance of performances for future generations.

Keywords: Shortage of Wayang face sculptors; Wayang facial features (Bedhahan); shadow puppets (Wayang); Wayang performances

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional performing art of *Wayang Kulit* or shadow puppetry continues to thrive in Indonesia, particularly in Java. Similar to Thai Khon, Javanese shadow puppetry is a branch of the performing arts, with its own unique identity, which blends art, literature, ritual, and craft (Hu & Vongphantuset, 2021). To a significant extent, the sustained success of these performances relies on the availability of meticulously crafted *Wayang Kulit* (literal meaning: puppets made of leather), particularly those with expertly sculpted faces. However, the profession of sculpting the shadow puppets' facial features (*Bedhahan*) is both crucial and rare. Skilled puppet makers play a pivotal role in the achievements of *Dalang* (puppeteers). Renowned *Wayang* puppeteers, such as Ki Seno Nugroho, Ki Manteb Sudarsono, Ki Anom Dwijo Kangko, and Ki Bayu Aji, have risen to prominence due to the outstanding quality of their *Wayang* puppets. Ki Seno Nugroho became widely recognized for his exceptional puppet of the character Bagong (Basri, 2022; Kalungan wayang, 2023), while Ki Manteb Sudarsono, known as "*Dalang Setan*" (the frenzied puppeteer), captivates audiences with his agile puppet-handling skills (Muhtarom, 2021). Younger *Wayang* puppeteers like Ki Anom Dwijo Kangko (SI SULIS WL, 2021) and Ki Bayu Aji (Dalang SAN Channel, 2021) have garnered acclaim for their precise puppet manipulation, utilizing well-crafted puppets to enhance movement during performances. These examples show that the sustainability of *Wayang* performances depends not only on dedicated *Wayang* puppeteers but also on the overlooked yet substantial role of *Wayang* puppet makers.

Previous research on *Wayang* has predominantly focused on the performances (Mrázek, 2005; Varela, 2014; Boonstra, 2014; Emerson, 2016; Andrieu, 2017; and Prasetya et al., 2023), with limited attention given to the *Wayang* puppets themselves. Studies concerning *Wayang* puppets have mainly emphasized the general puppet-making process (Sagio & Samsugi, 1991; Sunarto & Sagio, 2004), or new creations of *Wayang* (Sulistyono et al., 2023). In-depth research on puppet face sculpting remains scarce, primarily due to the perception that the facial aspects of *Wayang* puppets are limited to the detailing of eyes, mouth, and nose as part of the puppet's head, thus receiving less in-depth scrutiny as a distinct art form (Raharja, 2016; Holt, 1967) even though in a *Wayang* performance, the *Wayang* puppet's *Bedhahan* significantly influences the success of the *Wayang* presentation.

This article aims to address the lack of studies focusing on shadow puppets' face sculpting, particularly delving into three pivotal aspects: (1) the criteria for shadow puppets used in *Wayang* performances, (2) the significance of puppet facial detailing in determining puppet quality, and (3) the factors contributing to the shortage of puppet face sculptors. By elucidating these aspects, this paper aims to provide valuable insights into the reasons behind the shortage and proposes potential solutions to preserve and revitalize this essential aspect of *Wayang* performance. Furthermore, this examination highlights the significant role of puppet face sculptors in creating captivating puppets, ultimately enhancing the overall success of *Wayang* presentations. The subsequent sections of this article will expound on these three crucial points.

This study is premised on the argument that the quality of *Wayang* puppets profoundly impacts the success of *Wayang* performances. The success of a *Wayang* performance hinges on the audience's acceptance of the *Dalang*'s message during the presentation (Soetarno, 2005). In this regard, puppets specifically crafted for performances differ from those meant for souvenirs or collections. The focus on puppet facial detailing is crucial, as a well-sculpted face breathes life into the puppet, creating an immersive and engaging performance by the *Dalang*. Currently, only a few skilled puppet face sculptors possess the expertise to bring puppets to life through their craft. Expert sculptors infuse their creations with unique touches, often involving a series of ritualistic processes. In *Wayang* performances, puppets serve as mediums through which puppeteers express themselves. Hence, the presence of well-crafted *Wayang* puppets, including their *Bedhahan*, is a prerequisite for a successful *Wayang* performance.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMWORK

To understand shadow puppets' facial features or *Bedhahan*, three important and interrelated concepts need to be understood. These three concepts are shadow puppetry, the shadow puppet sculptor, and the shadow puppet as performing arts. These three concepts are explained as follows.

2.1 Shadow puppetry

Wayang Kulit, also known as shadow puppetry, is a traditional art form with deep historical roots that has flourished in Southeast Asia. This captivating performance serves as a powerful medium for conveying messages, information, and educational content (Prahmana & Istiandaru, 2021). Typically, a skilled puppeteer called a *Dalang* brings the puppets to life from behind a screen during *Wayang* performances (Astles, 2010). These performances are enriched with stories imbued with values, norms, traditions, and the essence of local

culture (Manik et al., 2022). *Wayang Kulit* stands out among puppet theaters as one of three distinct forms, characterized by its unique artistic style, intricate carvings, captivating coloring techniques, and a blend of diverse *Wayang* performance styles, enhanced by the clever use of shadows (Qu & Zhang, 2022). Mastery of *Wayang Kulit* demands not only exceptional puppet-making skills but also prowess in scriptwriting, musical accompaniment, and storytelling, underscoring the richness of local performance art history and culture (Fan & Hsiao, 2014).

Overall, *Wayang Kulit* emerges as a complex art form that artfully combines manual dexterity with the captivating essence of folk drama (Al-Dama & Rizal, 2020). However, this treasured tradition faces an existential threat due to the swift pace of social change and the lack of continuity among the younger generation (Yan & Qiang, 2016).

To understand the identity of *Wayang Kulit*, one must delve into its historical context. Originally, it served as a means of imparting Hindu and Buddhist religious teachings, drawing inspiration from the Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Candrayana & Kodi, 2021). In Indonesia, Islamic scholars and *kyai* (great teachers) utilized *Wayang* performances to propagate Islam, with Java as a focal point (Wijayanti & Sulaksono, 2019). The post-colonial era witnessed a surge of *Wayang's* popularity, a trend that continued into the 1980s (Purwantoro et al., 2022). Yet, transformations occurred in the stories portrayed through *Wayang* performances, transitioning from extensive all-night narratives to condensed means of imparting teachings in the modern era (Novica et al., 2020). Moreover, digital advancements manifested in the development of *Wayang* through social media platforms (Tomo et al., 2017). These shifts exemplify how artistic performances can adapt and negotiate with the ever-evolving landscape of technology and information (Purwantoro et al., 2022).

2.2 Shadow puppet sculptors

The practice of sculpting Javanese *Wayang* puppets is an integral part of the puppet-making process. The term *Menatah* originates from the Javanese language and refers to the sculpting process (Rahma & Doerjanto, 2016). Historically, the task of *Menatah Wayang* was considered a sacred endeavor, accompanied by a series of ritual ceremonies. Initiating the sculpting process was determined by careful selection of auspicious days according to the Javanese calendar. Similarly, the preparation of the leather for crafting the puppets was also carried out on auspicious days. Sculptors, or *Penatah*, would often undergo fasting during the sculpting process and adhere to various other rules related to the *Menatah* tradition (Riffai & Macaryus, 2018). However, many of these ritualistic practices have gradually faded away. Contemporary sculptors tend to focus solely on craftsmanship itself, as they perceive the process to be time-consuming. Nevertheless, the actual processes of puppet-making and sculpting still consumes considerable time because of the complexity involved in crafting the puppets, requiring specialized skills (Sugiyanto et al., 2023). Thus, sculpting is a factor in the prolonged process of puppet-making (Surya, 2021).

This extended puppet-making process bears significant correlation with the interest and regeneration of puppet sculptors (Wibowo et al., 2020). Historically, puppet sculptors were prominent professionals in many Javanese communities. However, the declining interest in *Wayang Kulit* has led to a decrease in the number of puppet craftsmen, resulting in a shortage of shadow puppet sculptors (Sedana, 2016). This shortage is caused by both internal and external factors. Internally, the diminishing number of sculptors is attributed to the craft being predominantly practiced by the elderly, leading to decreased productivity (Sedana, 2019). Externally, it is influenced by an unstable and declining interest in *Wayang* performances. Consequently, many puppet sculptors have switched to other professions or activities, such as farming. The lack of government support for activities to ensure regeneration has resulted in low levels of welfare and made the profession of puppet sculptors unappealing (Pratama & Subari, 2021). All these factors contribute to the shortage of shadow puppet sculptors.

2.3 Performing arts

Performing arts encompass various forms of artistic expressions (Aliyev, 2021), characterized by the different forms such as dance, theater, music, vocals, and more (Komander & König, 2024). These performances embody cultural manifestations showcasing human creativity within diverse cultural heritage domains and social-cultural roles (Matusky & Beng, 2017). Typically held within designated venues or performance spaces accommodating both performers and audiences (Amałowicz, 2020; Izenour, 1963; Xiao et al., 2019), the landscape of performing arts has evolved over time, extending beyond traditional performance spaces to environments that are facilitated by digital technology (Sukmayadi & Masunah, 2020). The digital transformation has introduced new performance spaces that leverage online social media and streaming platforms (Ford & Mandviwalla, 2020).

Transformations in performing arts have far-reaching implications beyond the artistic realm. Firstly, performing arts serve as cultural mediators (Bernardi, 2021), providing non-formal educational opportunities (Rahman & Aruan, 2019). Secondly, they hold potential for tourism development. The cultural richness

embedded in performing arts can become an integral part of economic growth, benefiting communities involved in the arts or the local populace (Kim et al., 2018). These performing arts often serve as cultural promotion centers to attract tourists, becoming essential components of cultural tourism agendas (Richards, 2014; Charoenrat & Charassri, 2017). Managed effectively, the interest in performing arts holds great potential, as throughout history, the performing arts have served as a medium for understanding community history, honoring significant figures, and even facilitating business negotiations, often encompassing political and economic elements (Tomás, 2014).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study investigates the art of detailing the faces of Javanese shadow puppets, focusing on the practitioners in two *wayang*-making centers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Pucung Hamlet in Wukirsari Village, Bantul Regency, and Gendeng Hamlet in Bangunjiwo Village, Bantul Regency have been long-standing hubs for *Wayang* production, with their communities heavily relying on this craft. Dusun Pucung traces its *Wayang*-making origins to approximately 1918 when Mbah Glemboh, a resident and courtier (*Abdi Dalem*) during the reign of Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono VII, was tasked with preserving and caring for the Yogyakarta Royal Palace's *Wayang* collection. Intrigued by this responsibility, he became interested in learning the art of puppet-making, which was later embraced by his neighbors, and continued development to this day. Presently, around 50 artisans craft *Wayang* in Pucung. Similarly, Gendeng's role as a *wayang*-making center began in 1929, initiated by the renowned *Wayang* artisan, the late Walijo or Atmo Sukarto, who created various artistic *Wayang* pieces. At present, there are 25 *Wayang* artisans in Gendeng.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach, following the methodology proposed by Creswell (2013). The primary focus lies in the experiences of the artisans involved in sculpting the faces of shadow puppets specifically used in *Wayang* performances. The research delves into the process of *Mbedhah*, which refers to the act of applying facial features to a *Wayang* puppet.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the case, observations and in-depth interviews were conducted with both the puppet makers and the *Dalang* or puppeteers who utilize the *Wayang* in their performances. The interviews with the *Dalang* aimed to gain insight into how they perceive and evaluate the character expressions conveyed through well-executed *Bedhahan*, while assessing the suitability for their performance requirements.

The main participants in this research consist of both the *Wayang* artisans and the *Dalang* who utilize the puppets in their performances. Two pivotal informants, RP1 and RG1, were chosen to represent distinct generations and came from different research locations. RP1 is a young puppet maker hailing from Pucung, while RG1 is a seasoned puppet maker from Gendeng. Further, there are ten other informants, comprising four puppet makers from Pucung (RP2, RP3, RP4, and RP5), four puppet makers from Gendeng (RG2, RG3, RG4, and RG5), and two *Dalang* (RD1 and RD2). The *Dalang* frequently interact with puppet makers when commissioning specific *Wayang* characters. All ten puppet makers boast extensive expertise in crafting *wayang*, having been acquainted with *Wayang Kulit* performances since childhood.

Data was collected through observation and in-depth interviews. The observations focused on the *Mbedhah* process performed by the puppet makers, while unstructured interviews were conducted while observing the informants crafting the *Wayang*. The data collection took place between February 2023 and May 2023.

Subsequently, data analysis followed Creswell's (2013) analytical model, involving three stages. *Firstly*, the data was reduced and reorganized into a more systematic form based on the pre-designed categorization. *Secondly*, data verification was carried out to draw conclusions based on the reduced data categories. *Thirdly*, the data was presented through descriptive accounts, including interview quotations and photographs, which serve as essential findings in this study. From these three processes, an inductive analysis was conducted to interpret the data as a basis for drawing conclusions regarding the shortage of skilled *Bedhahan* artisans for puppets used in performances. The interpretation began by restating the data in line with the current socio-cultural conditions, situations, and contexts. The stages and analytical techniques employed in this study facilitated the formulation of a conclusion about the shortage of puppet makers specializing in sculpting *Wayang* faces for performances.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research points to three important findings on *Bedhahan*. These three findings are (1) in shadow puppet performance, the puppets act as a *Dalang* or puppet master's secondary bodies, (2) *Bedhahan*

determine the quality of the *Wayang* performance; and (3) there has been a shortage of *Bedhahan* artisan. These three findings are discussed as follows.

4.1 *Wayang* puppets for performances as a *Dalang's* secondary bodies

Wayang Kulit puppets can be categorized into three types: souvenir, collectible, and performance puppets. Each type serves different purposes, as indicated by their respective names. In addition, these three types differ in terms of the materials used, manufacturing techniques, and the quality of facial features (Table 1). The optimal material for crafting *Wayang* puppets is the skin of buffaloes (*Bubalus Bubalis*). Compared to other animal skins, buffalo skin exhibits greater resistance to temperature changes and has a lower fat content, which prevents colors from fading quickly. While all three types of *Wayang* puppets generally utilize buffalo skin, there are certain distinctions among them, outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Shadow puppet types

No.	Type of <i>Wayang</i>	Material	Sculpting process (<i>natah</i>)	Facial detailing (<i>Mbedhah</i>)
1	souvenir	buffalo, cow, or goat skin	2–4 puppets within the same period	by non-artisans
2	collection	buffalo skin	sculpted individually	by artisans
3	performance	buffalo skin	sculpted individually	by skilled artisans

In general, the facial features of *Wayang* puppets for performances can be categorized into two types: refined characters (*Tokoh Alusan*) and heroic characters (*Tokoh Gagahan*). Refined characters are depicted with gentle and soft speech, including characters such as princesses, Arjuna, and Krishna (Figures 1 to 5). On the other hand, heroic characters are portrayed with loud and often aggressive speech, such as Gatutkaca, Bima, and giants (Figures 6 to 10).



Figure 1: Subadra
(*Putri Luruh* style)



Figure 2: Srikandi
(*Putri Lanyap* style)



Figure 3: Arjuna
(*Bambangan Luruh* style)



Figure 4: Abimanyu
(*Jangkahan Luruh* style)

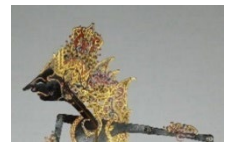


Figure 5: Kresna
(*Bokongan Lanyap* style)

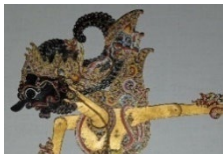


Figure 6: Gatutkaca
(*Jangkahan Luruh* style)

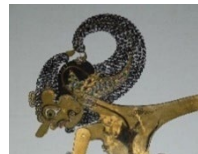


Figure 7: Bima
(*Jangkahan Luruh* style)

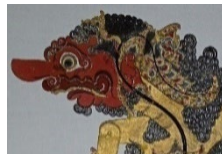


Figure 8: Rajamala
(*Kapangan* style)



Figure 9: *Buta Begal*
or thug giant



Figure 10: *Buta Patih*
or noble giant

Most of the puppet makers consider the process of crafting *Wayang* for performances as a sacred undertaking. The sacredness of *Wayang*-making is observed through a series of ritual ceremonies accompanying the craft. There are at least three types of rituals that puppet makers go through. Firstly, there is the ritual of *madeg juru tatah Wayang* (becoming a *Wayang* maker). Secondly, there are daily rituals for inner purification. Lastly, there are rituals associated with the actual process of making the *Wayang* puppets. The *Madeg Juru Tatah Wayang* ritual is undertaken by a puppet maker once they have begun to learn the craft and have committed to becoming a skilled *Wayang* maker. This ritual involves offerings and takes place at night in a secluded cemetery near the crossroads.

During this three-day ritual, the person is required to abstain from all food, consuming only water. Throughout these three days, the individual meticulously sculpts the *Wayang Gunung* (mountain-shaped structure) and must maintain absolute silence. According to informants RP1, RP5, and RG1 (personal communication, May 15 and 16, 2023), this ritual is highly challenging, and many aspiring puppet makers fail to complete it successfully, often succeeding only after undergoing the ritual several times.

The daily rituals commonly practiced by puppet makers for inner purification include fasting on Mondays and Thursdays (known as *Puasa Senin Kamis*), fasting on their birthday according to the Javanese calendar (*Puasa Weton*), observing a *Puasa Mutih* (a fast where they only consume white rice and water for 7 days), and engaging in *Tapa Kungkum* (meditating at the convergence of rivers during the nighttime) on specific

days. Furthermore, a ritual that is invariably performed by puppet makers during the *Wayang* crafting process is the act of prayer or recitation to invoke the presence of deities and infuse the spirit into the puppet characters.

An example of such recitation, as explained by informant RG3, is as follows:

I beseech the divine Lord God to bring forth the essence of life from the revered deity of the moon, *hyang candra*, and the radiance of the deity of the sun, *hyang sitaresmi*, into this puppet named [name of the character]; may the light of life infuse this puppet, captivating all who behold it, and instilling a sense of love and compassion, as guided by the will of Allah.

(RG3, personal communication, March 12, 2023)

In addition to the aforementioned rituals, the process of *Mbedhah* involves various unique and specific rituals practiced by different puppet makers. For instance, RP1 (personal communication, March 10, 2023) always begins the *Mbedhah* of the characters Arjuna or Rama by taking a bath and grooming himself, hoping to create a handsome portrayal these characters. Moreover, puppet makers often perform rituals upon the request of the puppet's commissioning party. RG4 (personal communication, March 12, 2023) had such an experience when asked to create the character Hanuman on a Tuesday *Wage* (when Tuesday coincides with the Javanese calendar day of *Wage*), as it marked the birthday of the individual who placed the order for the puppet. Thus, the process of crafting performance puppets involves distinctive practices, where various rituals are conducted throughout the creative process.

The series of ritual ceremonies carried out by puppet makers described above shows that the *Bedhahan* or facial features of shadow puppets are important components revealed by puppet makers. The ability to dissect puppet facial features will determine the position and class of sculptors. Puppet facial features are very important for the following reason: puppets with good *Bedhahan* qualities will determine the classes of the puppets themselves. In fact, the puppet facial features become the primary consideration of the puppeteers in *Wayang* performances because the facial features will help the puppeteers imagine, visualize and demonstrate the characters through appropriate sound, color, dialogue and movement. Hence, the puppet's facial features become a meeting point of puppeteer and audience in enjoying a *Wayang* performance.

The creation of *Wayang* puppets for performances differs significantly from those crafted for souvenirs or collections. In *Wayang* performances, the puppets serve as a crucial medium for the *Dalang*, essentially embodying a second self for the puppeteer (Hariyanto, 2021). When a *Dalang* manipulates the *Wayang* puppets, it is almost certain that their intense focus is on each puppet's face. The dance movements, hand gestures during dialogue, and hand movements during battle are all accompanied by changes in the *Dalang's* facial expressions. In other words, when the *Dalang* moves the puppets, they embody them. Through the breath and soul of the *Dalang*, these inanimate *Wayang* puppets are infused with life. Within the world of puppetry, there exists the concept of "puppeteership" aesthetics (*estetika peDalangan*), represented by the phrase *Dhalang Manuksmeng Wayang* (*Dalang* uniting with the puppets), referring to the moment when the *Dalang* animates the puppets with their soul (Zoetmulder, 1983; Sunardi, 2013). This state resembles Weiss' (2003) findings regarding the fusion of masked dancers with their masks. Thus, it can be said that the *Wayang* puppets act as a medium for the *Dalang* to reach the peak of esthetics, the *jouissance* of *Wayang* fiction.

Through the puppets, the linguistic power of the *Dalang* as the subject will also be expressed through bodily movements. Various explorations of the *Dalang's* movements bring the *Wayang* puppets, their secondary bodies, to life, and can be seen as objects of desire, aspirations that the *Dalang* continually pursues and fulfills (Linda, 2021; Nyoman Sedana, 2019). While performing, the *Dalang* assumes the role of an actor present in the imaginative space behind the puppet figures. On the contrary, the characters and personas of the *Wayang* are constructed within the *Dalang's* imagination (Warburton, 2020). At that moment, the audience becomes enthralled, regardless of how the *Dalang* processes language in their imaginative realm, as the audience focuses on the movements and every utterance of the *Wayang* characters. This illustrates that the *Wayang* puppets act as objects or mediums, while the main actor—the *Dalang* himself constitutes the subject.

4.2 *Bedhahan* determines the quality of *Wayang* for performances—Empowering *Wayang* puppets with spirit

Wayang puppets used in performances are characterized by the distinctive faces of the characters. Through these faces, both the audience and the *Dalang* can identify the individual *Wayang* characters. The facial expressions also serve as a means for the *Dalang* to convey emotions and express themselves during the performance. This observation is particularly evident during dialogues between characters, as the *Dalang* consistently focuses on the *Wayang* faces (Figure 11). Moreover, it is common to find some *Dalang* gazing at the faces of their puppets and even kissing them before the actual performance on the screen. The *Dalang* firmly believes that by examining the faces of the *Wayang* puppets, they can better imbue the characters with the desired emotions and fully embody their roles during the performance.



Figure 11: During the performance of the *Wayang* play *Padepokan Sokalima* at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta on October 30, 2021, Dalang Purbo Asmoro was observed gazing at the *Wayang* faces, particularly during dialogues between the characters

The act of the *Dalang* gazing at the *Wayang* faces is also intended to facilitate their deep immersion and effective delivery of dialogues for the portrayed characters. The quality of the *Wayang* puppets' facial features or *Bedhahan* becomes a primary criterion for the choice of puppets used by the *Dalang* for performances. The *Bedhahan*, intricately designed and colored with specific *Ulat-ulatan* (line) features such as eyebrows, eyeballs, mustaches, and others, aids the *Dalang* in envisioning and embodying each character. As a result, at a certain level, the *Wayang* and the *Dalang* synchronize, merging into a single character to captivate the audience (RG1, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

The success of a *Wayang* performance hinges on the pivotal role played by the facial features of the puppets. Hence, the process of sculpting these features, or *Mbedhah*, assumes a highly specialized significance. Based on observations during the *Wayang* crafting process, it was found that all the observed informants engaged in *Mbedhah Wayang* during the final stages, once the overall sculpting of the puppet was completed. This practice was particularly evident in the *Wayang*-making locations, where several *Wayang Gebingan* were present, referring to fully carved puppets that had not yet been painted (*Disungging*), with the facial parts often left unsculpted (Figure 12). This observation is supported by the following excerpt from an interview:

The final stage of the puppet sculpting process is where I focus on the *Bedhahan*, as I want to avoid ending up with an unsatisfactory puppet. If I were to begin with the *Bedhahan* and it turns out unsatisfactory, it might discourage me from continuing with the sculpting. To prevent this, I always reserve the *Bedhahan* for the end, once all the other sculpting work is completed.

(RP1, personal communication, March 31, 2023)



Figure 12: A pile of *Wayang* puppets awaiting *Mbedhah* stage

There are two processes involved when a puppet sculptor is about to perform the *Bedhahan*, namely *Nyorek* or sketching the pattern (Figure 13) and then proceeding with the actual sculpting. Both sketching and sculpting are carried out by the same skilled puppet sculptor. The essential features of the *Bedhahan* elements of the puppet consist of the eyes, nose, mouth, and teeth (Figure 14). For a proficient sculptor, it takes about 20 minutes to sculpt the facial parts, but for an ordinary sculptor, it may take hours. Based on observations of

the informants, there are variations in the sequence of the *Bedhahan* process among different puppet sculptors. However, generally, the sculpting process commences with the smaller details, such as the eyebrow, nostril, mouth, and eye (Table 2).



Figure 13: Puppet face with no sketch (left) with sketch and ready to be sculpted (middle) and puppet with sculpted facial features (right)

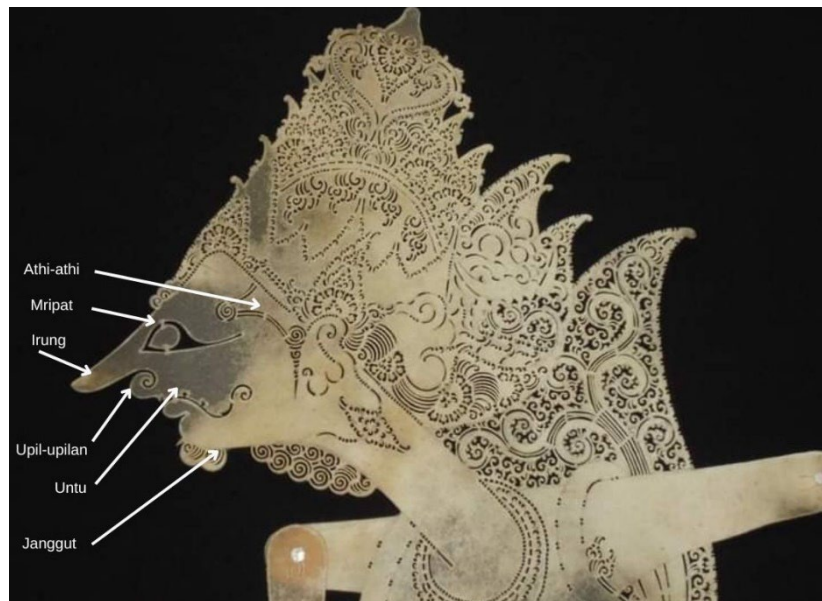


Figure 14: The facial features of a shadow puppet

Table 2: The sequence of *Mbedhah* or sculpting the face of a *Wayang* according to different puppet sculptors

No.	Artisan	<i>Mbedhah</i> sequence
1	RP1	<i>Upil-upilan</i> (nostril) – nose – mouth – eye
2	RP2	<i>Athi-athi</i> (upper sideburn) – <i>upil-upilan</i> – nose – mouth – eye
3	RP3	<i>Athi-athi</i> – beard and neck – lower lip – <i>gegetan</i> and mouth shape – <i>upil-upilan</i> and nose – forehead – <i>salitan</i> (crease) of mouth – <i>upil-upilan</i> – teeth – eye
4	RP4	<i>Athi-athi</i> – nose – <i>upil-upilan</i> – mouth – eye
5	RP5	<i>Athi-athi</i> – beard – <i>keketan</i> – mouth – <i>upil-upilan</i> – nose – eye
6	RG1	<i>Athi-athi</i> – ear – <i>upil-upilan</i> – nose – mouth and teeth – eye
7	RG2	<i>Bathuk</i> (head) – <i>athi-athi</i> – ear – <i>janggan</i> (neck) – beard and crease below lower lip – crease between upper lip and nose – <i>gegetan</i> – mouth – teeth – eye
8	RG3	<i>Athi-athi</i> – beard – <i>upil-upilan</i> – nose – eye
9	RG4	<i>Athi-athi</i> – ear – forehead – mouth – eye
10	RG5	<i>Athi-athi</i> – <i>upil-upilan</i> – nose – mouth – eye

To achieve well-crafted *Wayang* facial features, the process demands a high level of concentration and favorable environmental and psychological conditions. Each sculptor adheres to a specific time for sculpting the faces (Table 3). For instance, RP1 engages in *Mbedhah* between 09:00 and 10:00 in the morning, while RP5 does so in the evening around 20:00 to 21:00. The majority of *Wayang* artisans prefer to perform the sculpting

process in the morning. According to their perspectives, the air is still fresh, energy levels are high, and the puppet's material is more pliable during this time of day, as highlighted by one of the informants:

I perform *Mbedhah Wayang* in the morning because at that time, the leather material is still soft and easy to sculpt. The ideal time for sculpting the *Wayang* should not exceed 10:00 in the morning, as the temperature starts to rise and the leather begins to harden after that time. Another reason is that in the morning, the air is still cool, the mind is fresh, and energy levels are at their peak.

(RG3, personal communication, February 12, 2023)

According to RG3's observations, the process of imbuing *Wayang* puppets with their facial features should be aligned with the sculptor's mood, reflecting the character of the puppet. For instance, when sculpting the character Baladewa, who is known for his quick temper, the most effective approach is to undertake the sculpting process when the sculptor experiences a similar mood of anger or irritability.

When doing *Mbedhah Wayang*, it depends on the character and the mood of the individual. For example, if I want to sculpt the face of Baladewa, I will do it when I am feeling upset or angry, as Baladewa needs to look angry. The character to be sculpted is matched with the sculptor's mood.

(RG3, personal communication, February 7, 2023)

Table 3: Schedule for performing *Mbedhah*

No.	Informant	<i>Mbedhah</i> time
1	RP1	09:00–10:00
2	RP2	08:00–10:00
3	RP3	08:00–10:00
4	RP4	07:00–09:00
5	RP5	01:00–04:00
6	RG1	08:00–10:00
7	RG2	20:00–21:00
8	RG3	07:00–09:00
9	RG4	08:00–10:00
10	RG5	06:00–08:00

In addition to requiring high concentration and mood management, the process of sculpting *Wayang* puppets' faces also calls for intention and the availability of suitable tools. According to RG1, intention pertains to the time management of each sculptor to carry out the process of *Mbedhah wayang*. If a sculptor has set the plan to sculpt the *Wayang* in the morning, then from the day before, the sculptor is already prepared mentally and has made the necessary arrangements. Any distractions, tasks, or affairs unrelated to *Mbedhah Wayang* are completed before the execution day. This is because *Mbedhah* must not be combined with other activities, and the sculptor must be in a calm and composed mental state. The necessary tools are also prepared in advance, ready for use. Prior to commencing the sculpting process, each sculptor offers a prayer for smooth progress and satisfactory results.

The quality of facial sculpting significantly determines the overall performance quality of *Wayang* puppets. The puppets truly come to life once their facial features are formed. In essence, sculpting the *Wayang* puppets' faces is synonymous with imbuing them with spirit. Thus, it would not be deemed excessive for a sculptor, before undertaking the process of *Mbedhah*, to engage in specific rituals as they are bestowing life upon the puppets. For the *Dalang*, the *Wayang* puppets hold crucial significance as objects or their secondary bodies (Camilleri, 2020). The *Dalang's* touch on the puppets goes beyond mere manipulation for the performance; it becomes a sensation that resonates throughout their entire being, akin to a second self for the *Dalang* (Astell-Burt, 2023). Consequently, the *Dalang* becomes highly selective in determining the criteria for the *Wayang* puppets, as they seek an ideal embodiment to convey their linguistic power and express their imagination to attain *jouissance*. Therefore, the presence of the puppets' facial expressions is an ideal necessity, acting as a gateway to the imaginary realm where the *Dalang* vacate themselves and becomes one with the puppets in hand, enabling the *Dalang Manuksmeng Wayang* (unification of the *Dalang* with the puppets).

The expressions of the *Dalang* (the subject) are represented by their secondary bodies, continually speaking through symbolic language that is at times limited to movements manipulated by the subject. The formerly lifeless *Wayang* puppets are instantly infused with life by the subject through the sway of language. As the subject, the *Dalang* constructs every rule for their object, the puppet. They exercise control over the puppet's entire activity through the authority of their linguistic prowess, for it is fundamentally the subject that speaks and moves. In this regard, the subject perpetually strives to manipulate and control the object to attain

the pleasure of *Wayang* fiction. The fiction of *Wayang* as *jouissance* that the *Dalang* strives to achieve in every performance is represented by the common expression among Dalangs: "*dhalang kuwi swargane yen lagi mayang*" (the *Dalang's* pleasure lies in performing *Wayang*) (Hariyanto, 2019). This reinforces the notion that the pursuit of *Wayang* fiction is the primary objective of the subject, achieved through their secondary bodies — their objects — the *Wayang* puppets. If *Wayang* fiction is *jouissance*, then desire constitutes the practices wherein the *Dalang* produces language through movement and speech.

4.3 Shortage of *Bedhahan* artisans, the quality of *Wayang* performances may decline

Over the years, there has been a continuous decline in the number of *Wayang* facial feature sculptors. Most of these sculptors have switched professions to become factory workers or construction laborers. According to several informants, they transitioned to construction work due to the relatively stable income it provides compared to being a *Wayang* sculptor. To illustrate, in the Pucung region, a construction laborer works from 08:00 to 15:30 and earns Rp110,000.00 per day. In contrast, a *Wayang* sculptor who takes four days to sculpt the character Gatutkaca receives a wage of only Rp300,000.00 (equivalent to Rp75,000.00 per day). This comparison has led many *Wayang* sculptors to choose a different profession, resulting in a diminishing number of *Wayang* facial feature sculptors, as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Number of *Wayang* sculptors

No.	Location	<i>Wayang</i> sculptors	<i>Bedhahan</i> artisans
1	Pucung	50	8
2	Gendeng	25	6

The table above illustrates a significant disparity between the total number of *Wayang* sculptors and those specializing in sculpting the puppets' facial features. Out of 50 *Wayang* sculptors in Pucung, only eight are capable of sculpting the facial features of *Wayang* puppets for performances. Similarly, in Gendeng, out of 25 active *Wayang* sculptors, only six have the expertise to sculpt the facial features of *Wayang* puppets for performances. This disparity can be attributed to the fact that achieving mastery in facial feature sculpting necessitates a protracted and arduous process, as aptly demonstrated by RP1.

Informant RP1 began sculpting at the age of 10 while still in the fourth grade of elementary school. He acquired his knowledge of *Wayang* sculpting from his father and older sibling. He initially started his career as a *Wayang* sculptor for souvenirs, catering to several *Wayang* souvenir dealers. For four years, RP1 only crafted two characters, Rama and Sinta, as there was a high demand for these *Wayang* souvenir characters at that time. In a week, RP1 had to deliver eight pairs of unpainted Rama and Sinta puppets, which meant he had to sculpt until late at night or even early morning every day. He admitted that at that time, he did not fully understand the art of *Wayang* sculpting. His creative work brought him into contact with some renowned puppeteers, such as RD1, RD2, and others. From them, RP1 received valuable insights into the standard *Wayang* characters for performances, with a critical criterion being the facial features. Through these interactions, RP1 had the opportunity to observe *Wayang* puppets owned by the *Dalang*, known for their quality and being the preferred choices for performances. It was through these interactions with the puppeteers that RP1 acquired knowledge that later became the foundation of his expertise in *Mbedhah Wayang*.

The dwindling number of *Bedhahan* artisans is due to the fact that not all of them are capable of sculpting all types of *Wayang* puppet faces. Each *Wayang* sculptor has expertise in sculpting specific characters or categories of *Wayang*. For example, RP2 finds it easier to sculpt *Wayang* characters of the *Gagahan* type (Setyaki, Udawa, and giants) but struggles with the *Alusan* type (Arjuna, Sembadra, etc.) (personal communication, January 5, 2023). Conversely, RP4 finds it easier to sculpt *Alusan* characters compared to the *Gagahan* type, including giants.

I find sculpting the character of giants to be the most challenging because they have extreme facial features. If I don't sculpt them correctly, they won't look scary but rather cute. Sculpting characters like this can take me up to half a day. On the other hand, for easier characters, I can sculpt up to five *Wayang* puppets in a day.

(RP4, personal communication, January 5, 2023)

Based on the above quotation, it can be deduced that a *Wayang* sculptor specializing in *Alusan* characters may face difficulties when sculpting *Gagahan* characters, and *vice versa*. If a sculptor of *Alusan* characters is compelled to sculpt *Gagahan* characters, the outcomes may require a longer process and not meet expectations. This was experienced by RP1, a sculptor of *Alusan* characters. On one occasion, RP1 was asked to sculpt a giant, a *Gagahan* character. When the puppet was presented to a *Dalang* (RD1), the *Dalang*

spontaneously remarked, "Well, doesn't that giant look handsome?" (Figure 15). According to RD1's observation, the giant character crafted by RP1 did not appear fierce or menacing, but rather portrayed a smiling giant. This contrasted with the puppets made by RP2, a sculptor known for *Gagahan* characters, which resulted in *Gagahan* puppets with the intended fierce impression (Figure 16).



Figure 15: The *Galgahan* giant made by RP1, an *Alusan* specialist, has unintended refined qualities



Figure 16: The *Gagahan* giant made by RP2, a *Gagahan* specialist, resulted in the intended fierce character

The diminishing number of *Wayang* facial sculptors implies a potential decline in the quality of *Wayang* performances. Lifeless *Wayang* faces can affect the *Dalang's* storytelling. Conversely, captivating *Wayang* puppets with well-crafted facial features seem to speak on their own, minimizing the need for excessive movement or narration from the *Dalang*. Given the stringent criteria regarding facial features for *Dalang* performances, the best *Wayang* puppets for performances are ideally crafted by the *Dalang* themselves. However, in reality, it is rare to find *Dalangs* who also craft their own puppets. Nowadays, the production of *Wayang* puppets for performances is more commonly entrusted to puppet sculptors. Therefore, the sculptors are able to produce quality *Wayang* puppets when there is dialogue or agreement between the *Dalang* who will use them and the puppet sculptors who bring them to life.

Poorly crafted, unimpressive, or failed facial features in a *Wayang* puppet may result in a sense of regret and disappointment for the sculptor. The *Dalang* also experiences disappointment since the *Wayang* serves as their secondary body, acting as a medium to transform the expressions and language of the subject—the language of the *Dalang*—through the process of embodiment or *Manjing* to achieve the pinnacle of aesthetics known as *dhalang manuksmeng wayang*. However, if under certain circumstances a *Dalang* arrives without their own puppets (*Mara Njejak*) and finds that the provided *Wayang* is of poor quality, especially with subpar facial features, the process of *Manuksma* is disrupted. Encountering poorly crafted *Wayang* puppets, the *Dalang* may struggle to attain the pleasure of *Wayang* fiction.

In such situations, the *Dalang* may seek alternative strategies to detach themselves or find a way to achieve *jouissance*. Often, this involves playfully engaging in parody or even resorting to "bullying" the encountered *Wayang* puppets. The *Dalang* may feel a sense of urgency to quickly pass over the need to portray the poorly crafted puppet. There is an almost self-conscious feeling when confronted with a *Wayang* puppet with inadequate facial features, and the sense of regret can be disturbing and disheartening. To avoid such incidents, renowned *Dalangs* like the late Ki Manteb Sudarsono and Ki Purbo Asmoro, among others, when faced with *Mara Njejak* scenarios, will bring their own personal puppets, known as *Ageman*, for the performance, primarily for portraying main characters or puppets used to demonstrate *Wayang* movements skillfully.

5. CONCLUSION

The key finding of this research is that *Mbedhah* or sculpting *Wayang* puppets' facial features can indeed be learned, but it requires a significant amount of time as it is a non-instantaneous process. To become

a skilled puppet sculptor, continuous skill training is essential. Learning to be a sculptor, like learning a language, requires consistent practice to transform sculpting skills into habits.

This study complements previous investigations on *wayang*. Until now, the aesthetics of *Wayang* facial sculpting has received limited attention, being mainly confined to discussions among *Dalang* or puppet owners. This knowledge can be used to enhance *Wayang* education. Students studying puppet making should learn to create well-sculpted facial features. Similarly, puppet sculptors should receive training in the art of *Mbedhah*. Puppet sculptors need to collaborate with each other and complement their respective expertise, since each sculptor specializes in particular types of puppets. With collaborative efforts, assisting each other in sculpting according to their individual characteristics, the sculpting process can be expedited. Research is needed to map the expertise in sculpting according to the characters of the *Wayang* puppets.

This study has limitations in terms of variables and informants. It solely investigates one aspect of *Wayang* facial beauty, namely the sculpted features (*Bedhahan*). There is another variable that determines the beauty of *Wayang*, namely the painting (*Sunggingan*). Yet, regardless of how beautiful the facial sculpting may be, if the painting is not done well, the *Wayang* will not appear attractive. Conversely, no matter how well the painting is executed, if the facial sculpting is subpar, the *Wayang* will also lack appeal. Hence, further research on *Wayang* painting and studies in other *Wayang* production centers are necessary to achieve more comprehensive research outcomes.

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