

**PERFORMANCE PRACTICE, MUSIC AND INNOVATIONS IN  
WAYANG KULIT GEDEK IN KEDAH**

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**PERFORMANCE PRACTICE, MUSIC AND INNOVATIONS IN  
WAYANG KULIT GEDEK IN KEDAH**

**by**

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## **PRAKTIS PERSEMBAHAN, MUZIK DAN PEMBAHARUAN DALAM WAYANG KULIT GEDEK DI KEDAH**

### **ABSTRAK**

Wayang kulit gedek merupakan sejenis teater bayang-bayang patung yang terdapat di negeri-negeri utara Semenanjung Malaysia, terutamanya di Kedah. Wayang kulit jenis ini yang menggunakan patung kulit kecil adalah berasal dari Nang Talung di Selatan Thailand. Semenjak ia diadaptasi di masyarakat Malaysia, bentuk seni ini sentiasa diperbaharui dan dimodifikasi untuk memenuhi citarasa pelbagai lapisan masyarakat Malaysia namun masih mengekalkan sifat asal dan elemen-elemen tradisional. Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menyampaikan dan menganalisis persembahan-persembahan moden Wayang Kulit Seri Asun serta menerangkan perubahan-perubahan dan elemen-elemen baru yang telah ditambahkan dalam persembahan.

Inovasi Wayang Kulit Seri Asun melibatkan perhubungan antara penggunaan jenis-jenis panggung yang berlainan berasaskan jenis persembahan yang berbeza. Dari segi patung, bahan-bahan yang baru digunakan dan unsur rekaan baru pula ditambahkan dalam patung moden. Sebagai contoh, patung yang berpakaian baju Melayu / Muslim lengkap dengan memakai songkok. Perubahan-perubahan nyata juga didapati dalam repertoir. Kisah tradisional keluarga bangsawan negara telah digantikan oleh cerita moden yang berdasarkan isu sosial, patriotism dan hal politik. Watak-watak baru seperti Tok Guru (guru agama) dan penghulu Melayu telah dicipta untuk cerita-cerita tempatan. Alat-alat muzik baru seperti *cowbell* dan *tambourine* ditambahkan dalam ensembel moden.

Analisis muzik menerangkan perbezaan dan persamaan dalam lagu-lagu tradisional dan moden. Lagu-lagu tradisional digubah berasaskan struktur kolotomik, manakala lagu-lagu moden menggunakan bentuk muzik yang berlainan seperti bentuk binari. Penggunaan penekanan 2 bit yang berlainan merupakan salah satu sifat yang penting. Melodi-melodi tradisional digubah berdasarkan skel-skel tetratonik, pentatonik atau heksatonik tetapi skel diatonik diamalkan dalam melodi-melodi moden. Kajian ini juga meneliti perhubungan antara elemen-elemen muzik dengan gerak-geri patung. Misalnya, gerak-geri watak Maharisi berjalan menggunakan tongkat berkait rapat dengan melodi yang dimainkan oleh serunai. Namun demikian, lagu-lagu moden tidak mempunyai sebarang perhubungan dengan pergerakan patung yang tertentu. *Chant* ritma tradisional dan lagu-lagu nyanyian moden dikaji dari segi melodi, ritma dan teks. *Chant* berasaskan 2 pic menggunakan motif ritma, formula pengulangan dan silabel yang tidak mempunyai maksud. Sebaliknya, melodi lagu-lagu moden yang berasaskan skel diatonik dapat dilihat sifatnya melalui renj melodi yang luas dan penggunaan imitasi, sekuens atau repetasi.



## PERFORMANCE PRACTICE, MUSIC AND INNOVATIONS IN WAYANG KULIT GEDEK IN KEDAH

### ABSTRACT

*Wayang kulit gedek* is a type of shadow puppet theatre found in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia, mainly in Kedah. This type of shadow play which employs small leather puppets is a derivative of the *Nang Talung* of southern Thailand. From the time it was introduced in Malaysia, the art form has been continuously innovated and modified to attract Malaysian audiences of all ages even though its originality and traditional elements have been maintained. The purpose of this study is to present and analyze the modern performances of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun and clarify the changes and new elements which have been incorporated into its performances.

Innovations in Wayang Kulit Seri Asun include the use of different types of theatres (*panggung*) which are related to the occasions of the performance. New materials and designs including puppet wearing Malay / Muslim attire and *songkok* have been employed. Significant changes have also been made in the repertoire. The traditional stories of royal families set in kingdoms have been replaced by modern stories based on social issues, patriotism and political affairs. New characters such as the Tok Guru (religious teacher) and Malay *penghulu* (village headman) have been created for localized stories. There are some additional musical instruments employed in the contemporary ensemble such as the cowbell and tambourine.

The musical analysis reveals the differences and similarities in both traditional and modern musical pieces. The traditional pieces are determined by colotomic structures. However the modern pieces use different musical forms such as the binary form. Another important feature is the different use of the 2-beat stress pattern. Traditional melodic lines are based on the tetratonic, pentatonic or hexatonic scales

while the modern pieces employ the diatonic scale. Specific musical elements are linked to puppet movements in traditional pieces. For example, the character Maharisi's walking movements with his stick (*tongkat*) are related to the melodic lines played on the *serunai*. Modern musical pieces however, are not related to specific movements of the puppets.

The traditional rhythmic chants and modern sung pieces are examined from the aspects of the melody, rhythm and text. The traditional chants on two pitches employ rhythmic motifs, repeated formulae and meaningless syllables in the texts. However, the melodies of the modern pieces which are based on the diatonic scales are characterized by wider melodic range and the use of imitations, sequences or repetitions.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1.0 Introduction

Shadow play is the traditional puppet theatre which embraces the elements of dialogue, narrative, vocal and music. The puppet figures are curved out of buffalo hide or goat skin. These puppets are manipulated by one or more puppeteers behind the lighted screen to cast the shadows onto it. The theatre is performed for rituals as well as entertainment purposes.

There are two major types of the shadow play in South-East Asia. The first type utilizes the large-scale figures found in Cambodia and Thailand. The multi-character figures are held by the dancers who circle around the screen. The second type employs the small, single-character figures. This type of shadow play is found in Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia.

*Wayang kulit gedek* is a form of folk theatre found in northern states of Malay peninsular. This shadow play which utilizes the small figures is believed to be a derivative of *nang talung* in southern Thailand. In Malaysia, the *wayang kulit gedek* used to be performed in Siamese or mixed Malay–Siamese communities by itinerant puppeteers from southern Thai provinces during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ghulam-Sarwar 1992: 64).

At present, there is only one active *wayang kulit gedek* troupe in Kedah state, namely Wayang Kulit Seri Asun. This troupe is known for its innovative performance and performs at many parts of the country and foreign countries.

## 1.1 Focus of study

The *wayang kulit gedek* has been transformed and modernized from the time the art form came into Malaysia. Following the changes in the occasions for performance, the changes have occurred in the puppets and characters, performance structure, repertoire of story, and musical elements.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the performances of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun from the aspects of its puppets and characters, performance structure, stories, focusing on musical instruments and musical pieces. I will attempt to illustrate both traditional and modern elements of each aspect.

This thesis first presents the background of the troupe and performers. It then touches upon the occasions for performances which have been changed over the years. Recently, the performances are held mainly for entertainment.

The following chapter deals with technical elements of the *wayang kulit gedek* including the theatre, puppets and characters. Both traditional and modern *panggung* (theatre) of the *wayang kulit gedek* are examined from the material and structure. To replace the traditional *panggung*, modern simplified theatre has been innovated for modern performances. While the traditional *panggung* is made of wood, the modern one is made of iron.

The puppets are examined from the aspects of its material, design and shape. How are the puppets transformed since the time the art form came into Malaysia? For example, the traditional puppet figures are made of thicker hide and its design is highly influenced by the Siamese. On the other hand, the modern puppets are made of thinner

hide which enable more colourful images to be cast onto the screen.

The characters have also been changed to suit the modern stories which are based on the contemporary Malaysian society. Is there any character newly created for modern stories? The characters are analyzed in relation with the stories.

The traditional ensemble of the *wayang kulit gedek* consists of the *serunai*, *gedombak*, *geduk*, *canang*, *kerincing* and *gong*. Each instrument is analyzed from the aspects of origin, construction and function in the ensemble. There are also additional musical instruments in the ensemble, the cowbell and tambourine. These instruments are also analyzed.

In terms of performance structure, the theatre consecration rituals or *upacara buka panggung* is described in detail. The rituals in a modern performance remain essentially the same with those of the ritual performance. The rituals in the traditional performance, however, require additional offerings.

The stories have been changed in terms of the theme, story setting and composition. What are the traditional themes and settings and how are they changed in the modern stories? For instance, while, the traditional stories are always set in kingdoms and royal palace, the modern stories are created based on the current social issues. This paper presents synopsis of a traditional story and modern episodes to show the change and new elements in the story.

*Wayang kulit gedek* performances are accompanied by the instrumental music played by the small orchestra together with the songs sung by the *dalang*. There are traditional musical pieces and modern improvised musical pieces. Which musical elements have been changed and incorporated in the modern pieces? I analyze both the traditional and modern musical pieces from the aspects of texture, musical form, rhythm and melody.

The traditional musical pieces are based on the colotomic units<sup>1</sup> marked by the high-pitched *gong*, *gong anak*. Are the modern pieces still determined by the gong unit? The musical form of both traditional and modern pieces is examined.

The two goblet-shaped drums, *gedumbak*, and the two barrel drums, *geduk*, provide drum rhythmic patterns in the ensemble. To complete the rhythmic patterns, the drummers use 'interlocking' or 'shared' rhythmic patterns. Are there any differences between the rhythmic patterns used in the traditional musical pieces and the improvised modern pieces?

How are the melodic lines in modern pieces different from the traditional pieces? The melodic lines in both traditional and modern pieces are analyzed from the scale, melodic motion, melodic contour and ornamentations.

Are the instrumental musical pieces associated with the puppet movements and dramatic situations? The relationship between the puppet movements and musical elements in the traditional pieces is investigated.

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<sup>1</sup> Colotomic unit is the *gong* cycle which is marked at its end by the specific *gong* tone (Matusky and Tan, 2004: 25).

Apart from the instrumental musical pieces, I analyze the traditional rhythmic chants and modern sung pieces. How are the melodies in the chants and modern sung pieces different? Here I also aim to show the relations between the lyrics and the characters or dramatic situations. Other musical elements such as texture and rhythm are also examined.

## **1.2 Literature review**

This literature review consists of three sections. The first section of the literature review is concerned with the shadow plays in the Southeast Asian countries. The second section covers the modernization of shadow plays in contemporary societies. The final section of the literature review is on performance and musical aspects of the *wayang kulit gedek*. This review of literature is based on documentation and monographs such as theses, presentation papers, books, articles in magazines, and journals. These materials were collected at libraries at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kedah State Museum and National Museum of Ethnology (Japan).

### **1.2.1 The shadow play in the South-East Asian countries**

The shadow play is found in India, China and Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia. In this section, however, the literature on the shadow theatres in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia which are somehow related to my study of the *wayang kulit gedek* are selected.

In his article "Attempt at a Historical Outline of the Shadow Theatres" from the book *Traditional Drama and Music of Southeast Asia* (1974), Jacques Brunet claims that the shadow plays originated in India. From India the art form took two major passages to

Southeast Asian countries. First, the shadow plays which utilized the large-scaled figures were introduced to Cambodia and to Thailand. Secondly, the shadow plays which used small puppets were brought from India to Indonesia and then to Malaysia and Thailand.

## **Indonesia**

The book *Javanese Shadow Theatre: Movement and Characterization in Ngayogyakarta Wayang Kulit* (1982) by Roger Long focuses on the analysis of the shadow puppet movements and character types. According to Long, the characters in the Javanese *wayang kulit* are classified into seven major types, refined characters to coarse ones. He states that “a character may be identified with a specific movement” (1982:112), and that the character types and dramatic situations determine the certain movements.

A systematic analysis of the linguistic forms and cultural roles of the Balinese shadow theatre is provided in the book *The Language of Balinese Shadow Theater* (1987) by Mary Sabina Zurbuchen. The final chapter of her book talks about the cultural change and the changes in language form and function. She describes how the traditional art forms in Bali have been affected by new media including electronic recording techniques or cassette tapes and printed books. She then states that cultural setting interacts with the traditional art form to lead to the contemporary communicative functions.



## Thailand

In their article "Nang Talung: The Shadow Theatre of Southern Thailand" published in *Journal of the Siam Society* vol. 60, no.1 (January 1972), Michael Smithies and Euayporn Kerdchouay give a general overview of the *nang talung* while discussing some changes in the art form. This article mentions the performance occasions of this shadow play which include an ordination, wedding, funeral as well as contests. The theatre of the *nang talung* is also described here. The walls and roof made of *atap* (woven palm leaves) are now replaced by those made of corrugated iron. In modern days, the kerosene lamp which used to be the source of the light in the theatre is changed to a "lamp run from a portable generator". There are several hundred stories performed in the *nang talung* including Ramayana episodes, traditional episodes with giants and magical happenings as well as modern stories with communist and bandits. They state that the stories are "flexible enough to incorporate local elements". Some stories are didactic and teach village people "how to make a will or divide property". The synopses of two stories are found at the end of the article.

The presentation paper, *Nang Talung and Thai Life* presented in the International Seminar on Southeast Asian Traditional Performing Arts (1992) by Mattani Rutnin, covers the occasions for the *nang talung* performance, relations between religion and *nang talung*, the structure of the performance, stories and comic characters. She asserts that the procedures of opening ceremonies "must be kept in the correct tradition, otherwise misfortune, sickness, or even death may occur". Rutnin also mentions that while the characters of the royal family speak the Central Thai dialect, the comic characters speak in the vernacular language of Southern Thai.

## Malaysia

A number of past studies were concerned with the history and performance practice of shadow puppet theatres in Malaysia, especially the *wayang kulit Siam*. The book *The Ramayana and The Malay Shadow-Play* (1972) by Amin Sweeny focuses solely on the basic repertoire of the *wayang kulit Siam* which includes the oral Malay versions of the *Ramayana*. The study also compares the oral versions by different puppeteers and the oral and local literary versions to reveal the variations and relationships. The earlier chapters in the book, however, cover the cultural context and the relationships between teacher and pupil of the *wayang kulit Siam*.

In her dissertation *Wayang Siam: An Ethnographic Study of the Malay Shadow Play of Kelantan* (1980), Barbara Ann Stein Wright gives a description of the performance style, repertoire, characters, and other background information about the *wayang kulit Siam*. There is one chapter that talks about the 're-creation' of the art form as a 'national *wayang*'. It reveals that the traditional theatre underwent certain changes to be used as a vehicle for propaganda by the state. For example, the *wayang Siam* functioned "as the medium for its anti-communist, anti-drug and patriotic messages".

In her article "Islam and the Malay Shadow Play – Aspects of the Historical Mythology of the Wayang Siam" published in *Asian Folklore Studies* (1981), Barbara Ann Stein Wright focuses on Islam and the *wayang Siam* in Kelantan. She takes a look at several reasons for orthodox Islam to oppose the *wayang Siam*. Pious Muslims, for instance, assume that the magical aspects, the incantations and rituals of the *wayang Siam* which involve Hindu and Animist beliefs violate the teaching of Islam. The presence of Pak Dogol, the god / clown character, which is 'Sang Yang Tunggal (The One Great One)' is also considered incompatible with Islam. However, she points out

that, in folk beliefs, the religion and the *wayang Siam* are associated by introducing some puppeteers' original tales of *wayang Siam* which have links with Islam. At the end she states that "*Wayang Siam* has incorporated Islam into its complex of belief".

The first detailed musical description and analysis of *wayang kulit Siam* has been done by Patricia Matusky. Her book *Malaysian Shadow Play and Music: Continuity of an Oral Tradition* (1997) analyzes the musical form of the *wayang kulit Siam*. The musical pieces of this shadow play are based on the gong unit or *gongan* which is marked by specific *gong*. She also shows the 2-level stress unit with weak stress on the first beat and strong stress on the second beat. This weak-strong stress pattern is marked by the *canang* and *kesi* in *wayang kulit Siam* music. Matusky then examines the relationship between puppet movements and music. In the *wayang kulit Siam*, specific puppet movements are accompanied by specific musical pieces. As an example, Matusky associates the appearance of the sage, Maharisi, with specific drum rhythmic patterns. She further analyzes the music of a battle scene and the walking movements of refined puppet characters.

### **1.2.2 The modernization of shadow plays in contemporary societies**

The book *Puppet Theater in Contemporary Indonesia. New Approaches to Performance Events* (2002) edited by Jan Mrazek covers various aspects of shadow plays in modernizing Indonesia. In a chapter of this book, Brita Heimarck analyzes the musical development of the Balinese *wayang* as well as aspects of modernization in the theater. In his article "Waves of Emphasis and the Effects of Modernization in the Balinese Shadow Theater", Heimarck highlights the changes in musical repertoire, linguistic variation and the function of the art form. The length of the Balinese shadow

play performances has been shortened “in order to accommodate a modern work schedule”. As a result, some traditional musical pieces which are more sophisticated and associated with dramatic situations have been replaced with the simpler musical piece which is repeatedly played in a performance. As for language, the use of the literary language (*Kawi*) is gradually replaced with vernacular Balinese. The linguistic distinctions in Balinese which distinguish the characters of high and low status have also been discarded.

In another article “Paradoxes and Realities of Wayang among the Sasak of Lombok” from the same book (Mrazek, 2002), Judith Ecklund focuses on the Sasak *wayang*, the shadow play of Lombok, Indonesia. He talks about government involvement in *wayang* promotion in the 1970s. The local provincial committee comprising officials and prominent *dalangs* was formed to revitalize and support national and ethnic identities. The *dalang* was the medium who conveys the information and national ideology. The committee outlined main concerns about *wayang* including *wayang* education at schools, organizing festivals and competitions of *wayang*, and making *wayang* plots or synopses which could be published. With government support and control, Ecklund states that “the indigenous perception and sociocultural meaning of the medium” will be changed.

Another study on the *wayang Sasak* shows that the art form has been in constant negotiation with religion and the changing sociocultural contexts. In his article “Worlds of Wayang Sasak: Music, Performance, and Negotiations of Religion and Modernity” published in *Asian Music* (Spring/Summer 2003), David Harnish discusses the *wayang Sasak*, its performance, music, relationship with Islam and the contemporary condition. He talks about the popular *dalang* whose performances were

labeled as “*wayang pop*”. During the *dalang*’s performance, for instance, the folk characters dance to *dangdut*-style music. Harnish also states that the classic-style shadow play which embraces mystic elements is disapproved by the orthodox Muslims, while the modern shows which give emphasis to “humour and secular entertainment” are “more acceptable” to them.

A study on the *nang talung*, “Relevance of the Textual and Contextual Analyses in Understanding Folk Performance in Modern Society: A Case of Southern Thai Shadow Puppet Theatre” from *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 48 (1989) by Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool reveals that the folk theatre is formed as a result of interaction between two factors: text and context. She asserts that *nang talung* has been changing without “a complete break from the past”. First, the paper focuses on the changes in the visual form and the form of presentation which “allows its structure to accommodate new components”. Next, she clarifies that sociocultural factors have much effect on a folk theatre by examining the role of puppeteers in the society as well as their relationship with the community. She also points out that changes occur due to the restrictions imposed by the commercialization of performance.

The article “Popular Workers’ Shadow Theatre in Thailand” from *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol.19 (Spring 2002) by Paul Dowsey-Magog discusses the contemporary *nang talung* performances. The article reveals that more *nang talung* performances take place in urban festivals or annual fairs rather than village rituals. Following the change in the occasions for performance, transformations in the stories, puppets, techniques and music also occurred. The *nang talung* modern performers are reshaping the art form to attract the younger generation of urban areas. He also touches upon modern musical aspects in the contemporary *nang talung* performances which feature popular tunes. Western instruments such as electric guitars, keyboards, modern drum sets and

saxophones have been employed in the orchestra. *Wayang kulit gedek* has similarly negotiated with Islam and modernity as discussed in the literature above.

In terms of music repertoire, Ecklund (2002) and Harnish (2003) note that the number of musical pieces performed in the modern style is reduced due to the limitation of the number and diversity of scenes. This is also applicable to *wayang kulit gedek* music repertoire where some traditional pieces, such as the 'battle' piece, are not regularly used at present.

Textual changes are also seen in the *wayang kulit gedek* where the new puppet figures with modern outfits and trendy hairdo are introduced and the background of the story has changed from the royal court to the villagers' or townspeople's everyday life. The difference in the textual changes between the *nang talung* and *wayang gedek* is that the latter has incorporated some Islamic elements in its form.

All the shadow plays discussed in the literature in this section have been changing continuously as they negotiate with Islam, Buddhism or Animism, as well as the commercialization of the theatre form. The changes that have taken place in these shadow puppet theatres are similar to those of *wayang kulit gedek* which this thesis will present.

### **1.2.3 Performance and musical aspects of *Wayang Kulit Gedek***

Other studies on *wayang kulit gedek* performance are found in a thesis, booklet and several articles. In her M. A. thesis *Muzik Melayu Tradisional Kedah* (1978), Ku Zam Zam Ku Idris has analyzed three types of traditional musical ensembles, *wayang kulit*, *mek mulung* and *gendang keling* found in northern Kedah. Her discussion is

focused on three aspects of each ensemble; the musical instruments, the musicians, and the function of the music in the Malay society. This thesis provides the techniques of making the musical instruments, their history, and method of playing the musical instruments. According to Ku Zam Zam, the Wayang Kulit Seri Asun was first formed in the 1940s by Md. Noh Haji Mahmud. The paper also provides the sequence of performance. Here she states that the three traditional musical pieces played in the beginning of a performance are related with the invocations uttered by the *dalang*, therefore no alternations should be made.

In her articles “Musical Ensembles of Northern Kedah” in *Darulaman: Essays on Linguistic, Cultural and Socio-Economic Aspects of the Malaysian State of Kedah* (1979) and “Alat-alat muzik dalam Ensembel Wayang Kulit, Mek Mulung dan Gendang Keling di Kedah Utara” in *Kajian Budaya dan Masyarakat di Malaysia* (1983), Ku Zam Zam Ku Idris gives brief descriptions of musical instruments such as *geduk*, *gedumbak*, *serunai* and *gong*, techniques of playing the musical instruments and the sequence of the performance of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun

In his publication *Wayang Gedek* (2003), Hassan Othman gives an overview of the *wayang kulit gedek* with fine descriptions of traditional characters such as the clowns, giant and Mahaguru, the sage. Traditionally, the characters of the *wayang kulit gedek* “can be differentiated according to their categories such as the royalty, deities (*dewa*), and giant (*gergasi*).” Characters from each category “can be recognized from their body shape, adornments, attires as well as the weapons held by specific characters.” The musical instruments such as the *serunai*, *geduk*, *gedombak*, *kerincing*, *gong* and tambourine are examined from the construction and function in the ensemble. This book also provides the history of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun and the *dalangs*, Mohd.

Noh bin Mahmud and Abdul Majid bin Mohd. Noh. The synopses of three traditional stories: *Cerita Puteri Dua Belas*, *Cerita Siti Dewi* and *Cerita Muteri Mayang Mas / Phra San Thong* show the traditional setting of the story and themes. The stories, for instance, are set in kingdom and royal palace while the battles between royalty and giants, or magical phenomena are commonly featured in these stories.

In his book *Panggung Semar: Essays on Malay Traditional Theatre* (1992), Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof discusses the origin of *wayang kulit gedek*, its theatre, puppets, orchestra, repertoire, performance styles, performance structure, and story. He states that “spiritual performances are not substantially different from normal entertainment ones.” However, “additional prayers or invocation texts” are uttered in ritual performances. The detailed description of the procedure of the theatre opening ritual (*Buka panggung*) in *wayang kulit gedek* performance shows that the procedure has been kept authentic till present day. A traditional story given in the book entitled “Kua Yinn Samin Sau (The Aggressive Princess)” embodies traditional elements as well as Siamese elements. The story is set in a kingdom, royal palace and forest where battles occur between royal family members and giants.

In another book *Panggung Inu: Essays on Traditional Malay Theatre* (2004), Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof states that *nang talung* repertoire consists of stories “derived from Thai literary works”. The repertoire of contemporary *wayang kulit gedek*, on the other hand, derived from “Malay folk-tales and romances, Middle Eastern, Indian, or Javanese literary sources.” The article presents a synopsis of the Kedah version of *Ramayana* which the author collected from the *wayang kulit gedek* puppeteer. As he mentions, the *Ramayana* story which is based on the Thai *Ramakien* is rarely performed in the *wayang kulit gedek* performances at present.



In his article “Festival Wayang Gedek, Nang Thalung” published in *Dewan Budaya* (August 2003), Mohd. Ghouse Nasruddin clarifies that there are several modifications in *wayang gedek* and *nang talung* performances in terms of the puppet, story as well as musical element. He states that at present, less invocation is uttered during a performance of Wayang Gedek Seri Asun. This change has been made to suit the performance to Islamic teachings. The writer further analyses that the use of the *serunai* Kedah as a replacement for Siamese *pi* enables the musician to play modern songs which are based on the diatonic scale. The article also shows that the *nang talung* troupe from Thailand has incorporated modern musical instruments such as the drum set and conga in its ensemble.

Ku zam zam Ku Idris’s study has served as the principal source of information on the performance structure of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun in the 1970s. From her descriptions of the musical instruments in 1970s, it is clear that the ensemble of the *wayang kulit gedek* has been kept basically unchanged. As the recordings of the *wayang kulit gedek* in 1970s-1980s are not readily available, the traditional stories from Hassan Othman and Ghulam-Sarwar’s books are the primary resources for the present study.

Although there have been studies on the *wayang kulit gedek*, there still remains areas of this art form deserving further research. There has been no detailed writing on the modern performances of *wayang kulit gedek* or musical analysis on the theatre. In the present study, I attempt to cover both traditional and modern elements found in contemporary *wayang kulit gedek* performances and also analyze the musical pieces.

### 1.3 Research methodology

In this study, I have conducted two types of work as suggested by Curt Sachs: field work and desk work (Sachs 1962: 16). Field work comprises the gathering of recordings and the direct contacts with the particular music that is being studied. Desk work, on the other hand, includes transcription, analysis, and drawing of conclusions (Nettl 1964: 62).

The information contained in the present study was gathered during my field work conducted in 2004-2007. Research methods used in the field include observation of performances, being a participant-observer during the practices, formal and informal interviews and documentation of *wayang kulit gedek* performances by means of photography as well as video and audio recordings. I collected theses, presentation papers, books and articles in magazines regarding the form at the library of Universiti Sains Malaysia, The National Library, the Kedah's State Museum, Taman Budaya Kedah (*Pejabat Kebudayaan dan Kesenian negeri Kedah*) and The National Museum of Ethnology (Japan). As the recordings of the performances of *wayang kulit gedek* in the past cannot be found, I have relied on interviews with performers regarding the historical aspects.

Prior to my field research, in 2003, I spent a year learning the Malay language at the Centre for Languages and Translations at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) where I developed my Malay language ability which was enough to conduct field research myself. It was also at that time that I started to learn about the *wayang kulit Siam* and joined the *wayang kulit Siam* music class at USM which I will describe later.

During my field research in 2004-2007, I lived on Penang island and traveled to Kedah state where the *wayang kulit* puppeteer lived with his family. These visits were scheduled for formal interviews and my musical lessons where I paid the puppeteer a fee of RM 60 for each session.

I followed the *wayang kulit gedek* troupe to its performances where I collected information through informal interviews or casual conversations with the puppeteer as well as the musicians. For the informal interviews, I did not remunerate my informants. Whenever I attended the troupe's performance, I was exclusively allowed to go up to the stage together with the performers for the purpose of observation and documentation. I observed the performance while noting the melody played by the *serunai*, rhythmic patterns played by the percussion instruments, function and performance methods of each musical instrument as well as the relationship between the puppet movements and the music.

The first performance observation of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun was done on 2 July 2004 (8.30–9.30pm) at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. The performance was held in conjunction with the 'International Shadow Play Conference' organized by the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue & Museum of Asian Art. It was followed by the second session on 13 August 2004 (9–11pm) at Taman Budaya, Alor Star, Kedah. Wayang Kulit Seri Asun took part in Pentas Warisan Taman Budaya. The third session was done at Universiti Utara Malaysia in Kedah on 18 September 2004 (8.30–10.00pm). It was a part of the university's convocation ceremony program. I was also on the stage for the purpose of observation and documentation of the performance. The performance was held in conjunction with '*Festival Nang Thalung atau Wayang Gedek*' on 4 February 2005 (9–11pm) and 7 February 2005 (9–11pm) at Taman Budaya, Alor Star, Kedah.

Another observation was done on 30 March 2005 (9–10.30pm) at Padang Taman Seri Putra Kuala Kedah. The performance was held as a part of '*Kempen Budi Bahasa dan Nilai-nilai Murni*'<sup>2</sup>, "Pertadbiran Majlis Kenduri Adat dan Gotong-Royong".

During these performances, I documented the form through photography, video and audio recording. I took photographs of the puppets, musical instruments, the musicians playing the instruments and the *upacara buka panggung* (the theatre consecration rituals). Video recording was carried out to document the whole performance including the *upacara buka panggung*, puppet manipulation and performing style of musical instruments.

I conducted formal and informal interviews with the puppeteer and musicians of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun. In formal interviews, the content of the question was prepared beforehand and I received information especially about the performers' brief histories, sequence of the performance, puppets, characters and musical instruments through these interviews. In informal interviews with the performers and their family members, I received information about the origin and history of *wayang kulit gedek*, the history of the musical instruments, the performers' experiences and how they had learnt the musical instruments.

Formal interviews with the *dalang* of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun, Pak Majid, were conducted at his house in Jitra on 8 January 2004 (1–5pm) and 30 January 2005 (11am–1pm). During the first interview, I focused on the origin, history of *wayang kulit gedek*, sequence of performance, story, puppets, and musical instrumentation. At the second session, I concentrated on the history of the troupe and changes in the

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<sup>2</sup> 'The Courtesy and Noble Values Campaign' led by Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage.

performance and musical pieces.

Apart from the formal interviews, informal interviews were conducted before and after their performances through casual conversations. During an informal interview with Pak Majid on 23 October 2005, I was given the whole story of '*Puteri Duabelas*' (The Twelve Princesses).

During the performance held in conjunction with 'Manifestasi Kesenian' in Balik Pulau, Penang on 28 April 2006, I documented the experimental use of the *gendang silat* ensemble in the *wayang kulit gedek* performance. After the performance, I conducted informal interviews with the *dalang* where I asked about the new musical instruments as well as the puppet making workshops held at the *dalang's* house in Kedah.

I also had a chance to witness Wayang Kulit Seri Asun's live recording of an advertisement at Radio Televisyen Malaysia station Kedah FM on 8 January 2007. The *dalang* Pak Majid and musicians brought all the musical instruments to the radio station and performed a live recording where they promoted 'Visit Malaysia Year 2007' on radio.

Mantle Hood (1960) proposed the concept of "bi-musicality" where he suggested that it was important for a student to undergo training to be fluent in the music he/she was studying. This method requires the student to be a good observer and proficient musician in order to comprehend the practices of a particular music better.

In 2003, I started to learn the art of *wayang kulit Siam* and its music under the *dalang*, Che Mat Jusoh and Mohd Jufri Yusof at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). I learnt the technique of playing the *gedumbak* (single-headed drum), *gendang* (double-headed drum), *canang* (gong chime) and *kesi* (hand cymbals). I joined the troupe Angkatan Budaya Daerah Balik Pulau (ABAD) as a *kesi* player on the occasion of the performance held in Indonesia on 2-5 October 2003. The performance was held in conjunction with “The International Seminar on Oral of the Nusantara Traditions IV, Coastal Area Festival, Jakarta”. I also joined the troupe as a *kesi* and *gedumbak* player at the YTL-Penang Arts Festival in 2003 and 2004. I was the *canang* player at the troupe’s performance at Istana Budaya held on 19-20 May 2007.

To achieve bi-musicality in *wayang kulit gedek* music, I took musical lessons to learn the methods and techniques of playing musical instruments with musicians of Wayang Kulit Seri Asun at Taman Budaya, Alor Star, Kedah. The *dalang* Pak Majid, the *gedombak* player, Mat Desa Bin Murad and the *serunai* player, Zaidi Bin Ahmad became my principal teachers. My experience of being an apprentice musician of the *wayang kulit Siam* helped me understand and learn the musical system of the *wayang kulit gedek*.

During the first few lessons I was taught to play the most basic yet indispensable instruments to keep the tempo in the ensemble, the *canang* and *kerincing*. A briefing on the playing methods and the basic rhythmic patterns of the *geduk* was then conducted in the following sessions. The final lessons were focused on the *gedombak* which is one of the most difficult instruments to master in the ensemble.

I actually participated in the act of performing with the troupe by playing the *canang* and *kerincing* in a performance held at Universiti Utara Malaysia on the 24 September 2005. I was no longer merely an observer then.

#### **1.4 Analytical approach**

For this research I employ the systematic approach suggested by Nettl (Nettl 1964: 135) to describe the music of *wayang kulit gedek*. The musical elements to be analyzed are: texture, form, melody, scale, rhythm, meter, and structure. The musical pieces of the *wayang kulit gedek* repertoire are transcribed from field recordings as well as compact discs and tape recordings produced by the troupe.

A modified Western notation which was suggested by Otto Abraham and Erich M. von Hornbostel (Nettl 1964: 106-108) is employed to transcribe the musical pieces in score. The melody in the music of *wayang kulit gedek* is produced by the *serunai* or sung by the *dalang*. The melody will be analyzed from the aspects of the scale, melodic contour patterns and the melodic ornamentations. The melodic lines produced by the *serunai* or sung by the *dalang* are notated on the standard 5-line staff notation with certain supplementary symbols. The symbols will be shown in the list subsequently (Figure 1.1).

To transcribe the percussive rhythmic patterns, as well as gong pitches, I referred to Matusky's method of transcription. The mnemonic sound 'chap', for example, is abbreviated as 'C', the mnemonic 'duh' is 'D' for *gendang* (Matusky 1997: 94-96). A pair of small knobbed gongs called *canang*, and the large hanging gongs provide two pitches respectively. The high pitch is written above the single-line staff with stem up, while the low pitch is written below the staff with stem down. The two timbres, damped

and undamped sound, produced by the small cymbals called *kerincing*, are transcribed with special notes such as diamond-shaped note and x-shaped note.




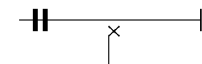


Symbol	Meaning
	A slightly higher than indicated
	A slightly lower than indicated
	Undamped <i>Kerincing</i> ('ching').
	Damped <i>Kerincing</i> ('chap').
	Mnemonic 'chap'.
	Mnemonic 'ting'.

Figure 1.1 Keys to Notation Symbols in the Thesis

## 1.5 Organization

This thesis comprises nine chapters. The first chapter provides a basic overview of shadow plays, focus of this study, review of literature, research methodology, analytical approach and organization of this thesis.

Chapter 2 is concerned with four types of shadow play found in peninsular Malaysia: *wayang kulit Purwa*, *wayang kulit Melayu*, *wayang kulit Siam* and *wayang kulit Gedek*. Each type of shadow play is briefly described in terms of its origin, characteristics of puppet figure, repertoire and musical ensemble. The historical background of *Wayang Kulit Seri Asun* and its puppeteers are also given in this chapter.



The biography of puppeteers, Mohd. Noh bin Mahmud and Abdul Majid bin Mohd Noh, are revealed to show the learning process to be a puppeteer. This chapter further considers the occasions for *wayang kulit gedek* performances in recent years.

Chapter 3 has four sections regarding the technical elements of the *wayang kulit gedek* performances. It first analyzes the traditional theatre or *panggung* and modern theatre. Secondly, changes in the *wayang kulit gedek* puppet figures are examined from the aspect of its material and design. It then discusses the traditional and modern characters of *wayang kulit gedek*. Lastly, the arrangement of the puppets in the theatre is revealed.

Chapter 4 deals with the classification of the musical instruments, origin, structure, methods and techniques of playing the instruments and the function of the musical instruments in the ensemble. Musical instruments are classified according to the Curt Sachs and Erich M. Van Hornbostel's system of classification. The chapter also shows the additional modern musical instruments and the *kayu pengetuk* (wooden clapper). It then touches upon *pantang larang* (the taboos or prohibitions) and conventions on the musical instruments in the ensemble. The performers' seating arrangement on the stage is also discussed here.

Chapter 5 first presents a detailed description of *upacara buka panggung* or the consecration and opening ritual of the theatre for a modern performance. It then deals with *acara pembukaan* (prologue) for a modern performance. Synopses of both traditional and modern stories are provided here to show the changes in terms of story themes.

In Chapter 6, I analyze two traditional instrumental pieces of *wayang kulit gedek* from the aspects of texture, musical form or gong unit, rhythm and melody. The association between musical elements and puppet movements is also examined.

Chapter 7 investigates the modern musical pieces which are based on popular songs. The modern instrumental pieces are also analyzed in terms of texture, musical form, rhythm and melody. The analysis shows the similarities and differences in musical elements between the traditional and modern musical pieces.

Chapter 8 focuses on the traditional rhythmic chants and modern sung pieces of the *wayang kulit gedek*. These pieces are examined from the aspects of texture, rhythm, melody and text. The musical elements in the modern sung pieces are compared with the traditional ones to reveal the innovations.

Chapter 9 summarizes the findings of this study on the traditional and modern elements and innovations of the *wayang kulit gedek*. This chapter then presents the innovations and experiments of the *wayang kulit gedek*. Finally, the chapter discusses the decline and revitalization of the *wayang kulit gedek*.