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Strength feminism in diplomacy culture: A case study of Central Javanese female puppeteers

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Abstract. This study examines the role of female puppeteers in cultural diplomacy through the performing arts of wayang skin in Central Java. Wayang leather, which has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage, functions as a medium of cultural communication rich in educational, moral, and historical values. The role of female puppeteers, despite facing patriarchal challenges, is increasingly growing thanks to the use of digital technology such as social media. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, using interviews, observations, and documentation analysis to understand the contribution of female puppeteers in promoting Indonesian culture at the global level. The results show that female puppeteers not only maintain traditional arts, but also introduce new, more inclusive narratives in cultural diplomacy. Through platforms such as YouTube, female puppeteers are able to reach global audiences, strengthen Indonesia's positive image, and influence international perceptions of gender equality in art and culture. This study enriches the literature on cultural diplomacy by highlighting the power of femininity as soft power in international relations, especially in facing the challenges of modernization and cultural globalization.

Keywords. puppeteer, women, cultural diplomacy, postfeminism, wayang skin

Introduction

Until moment This puppeteer in show Javanese puppets in particular puppet skin Still become actor main. Multi- role performed a puppeteer bring influence to the audience show wayang. Consequences the strengthen a puppeteer For choose chert No only containing information but also values education like religious , moral character , habits , prevailing norms as well as problem or the issue that occurred in public moment This (Ismah, 2017) , Apart from skills in to move puppet skin , puppeteer sued own adequate knowledge about values priority in Javanese culture . Puppeteer in context traditional must also endure sitting for 7-8 hours (overnight bored) for One performance puppet skin with play certain.

puppeteer responsible answer in a way full to the way show puppet skin like road story, dialogue flow, dynamics character puppet that will moved , musical harmony comes out from gamelan ensemble, and narrator (Supriyono, 2008). At the time In his spare time, the puppeteer also has profession as carver skin cow For made into puppet skin (Tannenbaum et al., 2018; Ramonita et al., 2023) . For that, a puppeteer required For have stamina, energy and power hold.

Specialty a puppeteer with criteria as above usually more suitable played by a man (Ismah, 2017).

As development progresses digital technology emerges phenomenon new in art show puppet skin. Through digital technology, one time show puppet skin only eat time about 2-3 hours. Changes rhythm in art puppetry through this digital technology become chance for emergence puppeteer women. Some puppeteer pretty girl known public Among them: Nyi Sri Harti Kenik Asmorowati, Ni Anisyah The following are the names of the women who are the most beautiful women in the world:

Utilization digital technology as means introducing one of Indonesian culture is experiencing global increase during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ramonita & Aruman, 2023). The performance puppet skin supported by digital technology makes it easy public enjoy it wherever and whenever with more easy, fast, and effective. Utilization digital technology becomes means diplomacy culture in global scene for introduce and promote inheritance ancestors who have recognized by UNESCO (Sampurno & Islam, 2020). Wayang, which has recognized by UNESCO as Inheritance World Culture, has mark strategic in build image positive Indonesia in the global arena. However, in tradition puppetry, role puppeteer in a way historical dominated by men. The presence of puppeteer Woman present dimensions new, good in context art and also diplomacy culture.

Study of diplomacy culture has Lots done. Cull (2008) in *Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories* mention that diplomacy culture is one of the the most effective form of soft power. Nye (2004) also emphasized the importance of soft power in connection international, especially in to form Power pull culture and values national. In Indonesia, Wuryandari (2011) studied diplomacy culture as soft power tools in various context, but focus on the role individuals, in particular women, still not enough explored.

In context puppetry, research previously more Lots discuss aspect aesthetics and tradition. Kraidy (2017) examines how cultural icons can become tool diplomacy, however studies specific about role puppeteer Woman in diplomacy Indonesian culture has not Lots done. Novelty scientific study This is on exploration role puppeteer Woman as actor diplomacy culture, especially in utilise strength feminine for influence perception international to Indonesian culture.

Study This leave from premise that puppeteer Woman No only act out function artistic, but also becoming symbol strength feminine capable expand coverage diplomacy culture. This is become important remember the more increasing global attention to issues gender equality in various fields, including art and diplomacy. So the formulation the problem that will investigated is How puppeteer Woman can become actor effective in diplomacy Indonesian culture and the extent of its power feminine they influence success diplomacy culture through utilization digital technology.

Study This aiming for analyze role puppeteer Central Javanese women in context diplomacy culture through utilization digital technology, exploring strength feminine they, as well as identify the impact to effectiveness diplomacy Indonesian culture. Analysis This expected can give outlook new about How art traditional can utilized in a way strategic in connection international.

Literature Review

2.1 Diplomacy Culture

The smoothness of foreign relations between countries cannot be separated from diplomatic activities. As a manifestation of soft diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is part of public

diplomacy whose implementation requires the involvement of the community (public). Cultural diplomacy is a form of special diplomacy that no longer uses force but through the exchange of information, art, language, and other aspects of culture between nations carried out by the government or society. The purpose of implementing cultural diplomacy is to understand each other and strengthen the spirit of friendship between nations (O. Enaifoghe & E. Makhutla, 2020).

Cultural diplomacy is part of soft power that aims to promote a country's cultural values to the international community, create common understanding, and strengthen relations between countries. Nye (2004) states that soft power is the ability to influence others through cultural appeal, political values, and legitimate foreign policies. In this context, cultural diplomacy plays an important role as a means to improve the country's image in the eyes of the world. Cull (2008) groups cultural diplomacy as an important element in public diplomacy. This strategy uses art, tradition, and culture as a means of communication to build harmonious international relations. In Indonesia, traditional arts such as wayang are an effective tool of cultural diplomacy. Wayang, especially in Central Java, has a high symbolic value and is often used to introduce Indonesian cultural heritage on the global stage.

In the theory of international relations, cultural relations formed between two or more countries emphasize cross-border cultural interaction. Cultural interactions between countries are not solely initiated and initiated by the government but can emerge spontaneously from the community whose goal is to support the achievement of national interests according to their foreign policies (Pajtinka, 2014). Cultural diplomacy prioritizes arts and culture materials, such as dance, painting, performing arts, culinary, fashion, puppetry, and things related to community art and cultural products (Purwasito et al., 2019). Cultural diplomacy is a way for the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or national identity. The goal is to advance socio-cultural, economic and political cooperation, promote ancestral heritage, and build relations between two or more countries. Cultural diplomacy activities are not only carried out by the government but also the private sector, mass media, and even society in order to achieve national interests (Lamal & Van Gelder, 2021).

2.2 Postfeminism

As a new perspective, postfeminism describes the achievement of gender equality. Postfeminism as a form of popular culture and sensibility emerged in the West in the 1980s. In the postfeminist view, women are able to act on their own will according to their ability to adapt to the current era. As an epistemological breakthrough, women in the postfeminist view are able to understand their portion of power and freedom in gender relations which indicate equal interaction between men and women in social reality (Sorrentino, 2021).

The post-feminist subject, as defined by Diane Negra, is “white and middle class” through media representation. Simply put, postfeminism is defined as a form of freedom of choice related to work and women's empowerment (Thornham & Pengpeng, 2010). Women's empowerment requires education, skills, and jobs that support professionalism (Yang, 2020). Postfeminism that has developed in Asian countries has different characteristics from its predecessors from the West. Postfeminism that has developed in the Asian region is not based on class differences but on the relationship between female elites and the state, and the attachment of postfeminism to local feminism. Transnational thinking as a bridge between Western and local feminism as suggested by Dosekun (2015) through a culture that is able to transcend national boundaries, discourses and certain national practices.

In the context of wayang, female puppeteers reflect the principles of postfeminism by challenging traditional gender norms. They not only take on roles that are usually dominated

by men, but also change the perception of women in art and culture. Female puppeteers are a symbol of feminine power that can contribute to cultural diplomacy, creating a more inclusive narrative. Postfeminism provides a theoretical basis for understanding how female puppeteers use their gender identity to influence Indonesian cultural diplomacy. By integrating traditional and modern values, they expand the role of women in international relations.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach design or design in case studies by exploring real life, through detailed and in-depth data collection involving various sources of information (eg, observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents and various manuscripts) (Creswell, 2015). Creswell herself in the case study research went through several steps, namely: 1) determining the case being studied in the form of individuals, groups, activities or certain phenomena that are unique, interesting, and allow for more in-depth study. In this study, women as puppeteers of wayang kulit from Central Java Province who utilize digital technology as a means to introduce Nusantara culture; 2) collecting data through interview sources with informants, namely female puppeteers, observations of wayang kulit performances by female puppeteers in Central Java Province, and documentation of the use of Youtube as a means for female puppeteers to carry out cultural diplomacy; 3) data is analyzed inductively based on patterns and themes that emerge from data related to wayang kulit performances by female puppeteers from Central Java Province through the Youtube channel during the period 2023 to 2024; 4) data is described in detail from the case reviewed including its background, history, and unique characteristics; 5) presenting research findings narratively by emphasizing the uniqueness and complexity of female puppeteers in playing traditional wayang as actors of cultural diplomacy.

Result and Discussion

4.1 Development of the Profession of Female Puppeteers in Wayang Kulit Performances in Java

Wayang kulit is a form of traditional performing art that has become an inseparable part of the cultural identity of the archipelago. As a cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO, wayang kulit not only functions as entertainment but also as a medium for education and conveying moral messages. In the context of cultural diplomacy, wayang kulit plays a significant role in introducing Indonesian values to the world. However, this role becomes more complex when involving female puppeteers, who bring new narratives to traditional arts dominated by men.

Wayang kulit has long been used as a tool to convey noble values, both in local and international contexts. As stated by I Kadek et al. (2024), wayang kulit reflects the values, beliefs, and history of the Indonesian people. In cultural diplomacy, this art not only preserves local identity but also becomes an effective medium for building cross-cultural dialogue. Farida and Zakiyah (2022) added that wayang kulit is also a means of social commentary, responding to contemporary issues while maintaining traditional narratives.

The role of female puppeteers in wayang kulit began to stand out since the 18th century, although their roles were initially limited to being sinden or pengrawit. Until now, female puppeteers continue to face stigma and challenges stemming from patriarchal norms. As expressed by Lis (2013), male dominance in the art of puppetry is still strong, especially in the role of ruwat puppeteers who have high spiritual values. This discrimination is reflected in the

public's view that female puppeteers are not yet able to match male puppeteers, both in terms of vocal ability and puppet movement techniques.

The results of interviews with female puppeteers such as Saryanti and Sri Kenik Asmorowwati revealed that female puppeteers must work hard to overcome societal expectations. They are required to have deep voices and energetic movements, especially in war scenes. This shows that in addition to facing technical challenges, female puppeteers must also prove their abilities amidst strong gender stereotypes. However, over time, acceptance of female puppeteers has increased, as written by Henry Spiller entitled *Challenging Gender Norms in Javanese Wayang Performance* (2014), which notes the increase in the number of female puppeteers in wayang kulit performances in the 21st century.

From several explanations of the informants, it shows that the challenges and demands of society towards a female puppeteer are not easy. Female puppeteers in wayang kulit performances are sometimes still interpreted as a form of representation of Javanese culture that places women themselves. In general, Javanese women are identified with the character as creatures who are narimo (accepting the situation sincerely) who are also fighters to be more appreciated and accepted in a holistic environment.

4.2 Utilization of YouTube as a Means of Introducing Nusantara Culture

The development of social media has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including cultural diplomacy. In the era of the global health crisis, wayang kulit performances that previously took place face-to-face with the physical presence of the audience—have shifted to a digital format through social media platforms. This change shows how social media not only functions as a communication tool, but also as an effective medium for cultural diplomacy. In the context of cultural diplomacy, social media is a strategic means to introduce local arts and culture to a global audience. As stated by Effendy (2003), social media is a powerful tool for information, mobilization, and promotion. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook allow female puppeteers from Central Java to showcase the uniqueness of wayang kulit to a wider audience, across geographical and cultural boundaries.

Female puppeteers not only face traditional challenges in fighting gender stereotypes, but also successfully utilize social media to expand the reach of cultural diplomacy. They are able to combine traditional values with digital innovation, creating an engaging performance experience for audiences across generations. As stated by Frederick and Maharani (2021), social media provides space for the widespread dissemination of information and messages. During the period of social restrictions due to the global health crisis, female puppeteers used social media as a digital public space to stay connected with their communities. By utilizing the live streaming feature, they not only maintained interaction with local audiences but also attracted the interest of international audiences. This strengthens the position of female puppeteers as agents of cultural diplomacy who are adaptive to changing times. The use of smartphones and social media platforms during the global health crisis increased significantly. Data from Tyagi et al. (2021) shows that the 15-30 age group was the main user of gadgets during this period, followed by the 31-40 age group. The increased use of this technology opens up new opportunities for performing arts, including wayang kulit, to develop in the digital realm.

4.3 The Role of Female Puppeteers as Actors of Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy plays a strategic role in international relations, especially as part of soft power. International relations theory places cross-border cultural interaction as an important element in building relations between nations. As explained by Pajtinka (2014), cultural diplomacy initiatives do not always come from the government, but can also grow

spontaneously from society. In this context, traditional performing arts such as wayang kulit play a role as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, where artists act as non-state actors who support foreign policy goals.

Likewise, Enaifoghe and Makhutla (2020) emphasize that cultural diplomacy includes the exchange of ideas, arts, and cultural values between nations. This diplomacy aims to increase understanding between nations while influencing public opinion in supporting the country's political and economic goals. Therefore, wayang kulit performing arts with female puppeteers not only preserve cultural heritage but also play a strategic role in introducing Indonesia's cultural identity on the international stage.

The existence of female puppeteers in Central Java, especially during the global health crisis, shows how traditional performing arts can adapt to modern technology. The social restrictions imposed to suppress the spread of COVID-19 have encouraged artists to utilize digital media such as YouTube as a new medium. In this case, female puppeteers such as Nyi Kenik Asmorowati and Nyi Sarwiyanti have succeeded in making the platform an effective means of cultural diplomacy. Through wayang kulit performances broadcast virtually, female puppeteers not only maintain the sustainability of traditional arts but also attract the attention of global audiences. For example, the performance by Nyi Kenik at the Convention Hall of the Great Mosque of Central Java on May 2, 2020, managed to attract more than 254 thousand viewers. This shows that traditional arts can remain relevant by utilizing digital technology as a bridge between local culture and international audiences. Social media such as YouTube provides space for artists to convey cultural narratives rich in local values. In the context of cultural diplomacy, the use of social media by female puppeteers shows how soft power can be effectively exercised through cultural introduction. Wayang kulit performances through digital platforms not only function as entertainment, but also as educational media that introduce philosophical values such as Hasta Brata and Baladewa Muksa to the wider audience. Comments and appreciation from the audience show a significant social impact. Audiences from various backgrounds have given their support to the role of female puppeteers in preserving traditional arts. This strengthens the position of female puppeteers as cultural agents who are able to build cross-country networks and strengthen intercultural understanding.

Conclusion

The results of the research in general have proven the assumptions of this research, namely the focus of Lamongan Regency Public Relations in planning City Branding Lamongan Regency is an effort to awaken the region, build public trust, develop the economy, and improve the region's positive image. In this activity, Public Relations has carried out several stages of City Branding planning, starting from research to evaluation. Although at the beginning of the planning for disseminating information, there was still little feedback from the community, but with continuous strengthening of socialization, the Lamongan community participated in City Branding planning activities. This means that Public Relations has carried out its function in communicating to foster good relations between the Government and the community as well as all stakeholders. In addition, the purpose of planning the City Branding of Lamongan Regency as Lamongan Megilan has been well achieved starting from the initial launch in 2021 until now. With the increase in tourist visitors and the development of human resources, the infrastructure sector is still not well developed. Considering that the infrastructure sector is included in image communication in City Branding, namely premiere communication, covering all views of the city such as landscape strategy, infrastructure, bureaucracy, as well as all behaviors or actions regarding the city.

Recommendation

In this study the government and cultural communities can increase access to training for female puppeteers, both in the technical aspects of puppetry and the use of digital media to expand the reach of global audiences. In addition, further studies are needed to explore the specific impact of the role of female puppeteers in strengthening international relations through art, as well as its influence on international perceptions of Indonesian culture.

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