

## Wayang Potehi and the Resistance of the Chinese Ethnic Minority Group Against Racial Discrimination in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*Since the colonial era in Indonesia, the Chinese ethnic minority group has often experienced problems of racial discrimination in their lives. As a medium of resistance against racial discrimination, they utilize Wayang Potehi, Chinese glove puppets featured in stage performances. This qualitative research uses cultural identity theory and a critical ethnographic approach to find forms of racism and the implementation of Wayang Potehi as a resistance to racism. The results of this study show that the reason why the Chinese ethnic group uses Wayang Potehi by ignoring the truth of the knight figure is because in Java the Chinese ethnic group is a minority group that only relies on communication. Therefore, communication is built through the Wayang Potehi performance as a form of covert or symbolic resistance to the local community. In addition, the Chinese ethnic community also often experiences verbal violence in the form of insults or harassment.*

**Keywords:** *Wayang Potehi, Chinese Ethnic Minority, Discrimination, Resistance, Emancipation.*

### Introduction

The Chinese ethnic group has been in Indonesia, especially in Java, since the 5th century AD. They came as explorers or traders and landed at the port in Palembang. They started trading goods like spices, metal raw materials, textiles, and food (Hirwan et al., 2013). The number of ethnic Chinese people in Indonesia is relatively small, or approximately 2.5% to 3% of the total population of Indonesia. Based on data from Databox, the number of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia in 2022 was 7,670,000 people. According to Melly G. Tan, this number increased from 7,000,000 in 2016 (Databox, 2022).

As a minority community, the existence of the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia is inseparable from the problem of racial discrimination. Sir Thomas S.B. Raffles, in his book 'History of Java' (1871), explained that the racial conflict of the Chinese ethnic group occurred because they did not have a stance on whether to defend the colonized or the colonizer. They always sided with the group that benefited them. Even the colonialists themselves felt betrayed when the Chinese ethnic group sided with Indonesia because there was a reward for the benefits. Therefore, oppression of the Chinese ethnic group was carried out not only by the colonialists but also by local or indigenous people (Raffles, 2014).

During the colonial era, the colonial rulers carried out socio-economic segregation of the indigenous people and the Chinese ethnic group with the aim of dividing their relationship. In fact, this social segregation and division still continues today. This is because the people and government in Indonesia still differentiate between the indigenous people and the Chinese ethnic group, who in the past were commonly referred to as non-indigenous people, the '*peranakan*' or '*totok*' people, or citizens of Chinese descent (Babari, J; Sugeng, 1999). In terms of the Constitutional State of the Republic of Indonesia, the Chinese ethnic group expressed the existence of political discrimination. Political discrimination against the Chinese ethnic group took place from the Old Order to the New Order (Chen, 2022).

Discrimination against the Chinese ethnic group who adhere to Taoism and Confucianism in Indonesia continued until the New Order era. The Chinese ethnic group was considered a foreign group, a disruptive group, a modern colonialist, and a taker of the property rights of indigenous or local residents. The discrimination experienced by the Chinese ethnic group was in the form of policies related to birth

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registration and citizenship certificates. This began with the issuance of Presidential Instruction (Inpres) Number 14 of 1967 concerning Religion, Beliefs and Chinese customs (Inpres No.40, 1967).

Based on several previous studies, Chinese women are often victims of discrimination (Johnston & Lordan, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2021; Su et al., 2017). Chinese women often experience discrimination by men who tend to be dominant. Discrimination against Chinese women occurs not only in Indonesia, but also in Hong Kong, Guang Zhou, and Xiaman, where the majority of the population is Chinese (Juang & Alvarez, 2010, 2011; Lewis et al., 2012). In addition to experiencing violent conflict, Chinese women are often victims of sexual harassment. Regarding health issues, many Chinese women experience discrimination when exposed to disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19 (Cheah et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022; Zong et al., 2022, 2023). Chinese women who are affected by other diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, also experience discrimination and are ostracized in their social environment (Carlson et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2010). The exclusion of Chinese women also occurs among migrant workers in several countries, not only in China. They are considered as carriers of disease and spreaders of HIV so that women are marginalized and have almost no place in society.

Discrimination against the Chinese ethnic group also occurs in Western countries, especially for ethnic Chinese immigrants or the Diaspora (Juang & Nguyen, 2010; Li, 2019; Lou et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022). In some Western countries, Asian migrant workers are always in the spotlight because their existence is not as a local community and is considered to have taken the portion of work of the native community. Acculturation between ethnic Chinese and ethnic whites in Western countries does not run smoothly. Racial problems continue to grow due to negative public sentiment towards migrants from China (Juang & Cookston, 2009).

Discrimination against ethnic Chinese occurred in Indonesia during the New Order. However, in the Reformation Era, there was a very significant change. The gap and discrimination between ethnicities have been eliminated with the recognition of Confucianism as a religion in Indonesia and the issuance of Presidential Instruction Number 26 of 1998 concerning the termination of the use of the terms indigenous and non-indigenous. In addition, the government also ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination in 1999 (Jauhari, 2023). Legally, Law Number 40 of 2008 concerning the Elimination of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination came into effect in October 2008. This was done by considering the risk factors that occurred due to racial disparities (Post et al., 2022). Efforts to eliminate discrimination against ethnic Chinese were carried out during the administration of President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) in 1999.

Activities that acknowledge the existence of the Chinese ethnic group have been openly demonstrated and even appear to receive special treatment, for example in Chinese New Year celebrations and other Chinese cultural performances such as Barongsai, Lang Liong Dance, and Potehi Puppet Theater (Hirwan et al., 2013).

Potehi Puppet Theater or Wayang Potehi was formerly known as *Pouw Tee Hie*. *Pouw Tee* means bag or sack, while *Hie* means drama (Purwoseputro et al., 2014). According to Denys Lombart, in China the Potehi Puppet Theater is also called *Budaxi*, derived from the words *Budai* (sack) and *Xi* (drama or puppet). *Budaxi* is a term from Mandarin which is the current national language of China. Wayang Potehi has existed in Java since the 16th century. Meanwhile, in China, Wayang Potehi has existed from the 7th to 9th centuries during the Tang Dynasty (Salmon, 2014). Wayang Potehi was originally a Chinese ethnic cultural art performed on Chinese holidays such as Chinese New Year and religious holidays of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. However, Wayang Potehi has developed into an art performance that can be held at any time. There are many fans of Wayang Potehi, starting from the Chinese ethnic community to local people who usually watch Wayang Potehi performances in Kelenteng, a place of worship for adherents of traditional Chinese beliefs (Purwoseputro, 2014).

The relationship between the Chinese and Javanese ethnic groups during the kingdom period was quite good. Because the majority of Chinese immigrants in Java came from the Hokkian Province, the Sehu Potehi or puppeteers of Wayang Potehi always used Hokkian when playing Wayang Potehi in religious

ceremonies (Andika, Febrian; Zulfa, Ilma; Hanivirgine, Maydi; Cahyono, 2021). Gradually the local community became familiar with Wayang Potehi show and it was part of the dynamics of the lives of Chinese ethnic community, especially those living in Java. In Java, Wayang Potehi is basically a reflection of cultural acculturation in harmony. The Hokkien spoken language slowly mixed with Malay which became the lingua franca of the Chinese community. Wayang Potehi is no longer purely in Hokkien but has mixed with Malay, thus becoming a unique and amazing development (Kuardhani, 2019).

Wayang Potehi originally depicted symbols of chivalry, goodness, virtue, and justice. From its inception until its entry into Java Island, Indonesia, this kind of marking went well. However, the Chinese racial conflict re-emerged when the former Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahja Purnama or commonly called Ahok, was caught in a blasphemy case. He was accused of insulting the Al-Quran - Al Maidah verse 50. The case then sparked resistance from Islamic organizations in Indonesia, including fanatical Islamic communities, who were furious with Ahok's statement, which eventually led to the re-emergence of discrimination and racial conflict in 2017.

As stated by Latief and Kwik Kian Gie, in general, one of the causes of racial conflict involving ethnic Chinese is because they show an attitude of not wanting to interact or mingle with other community groups. They tend to form their own groups (Suryani & Azmy, 2020). This is what causes negative assumptions among the majority of society and triggers major conflicts. When racial conflict occurs, the ethnic Chinese community fights through various media, one of which is through Wayang Potehi. Wayang Potehi also creates practical and philosophical knowledge through various depictions of Chinese community life. Like puppet art performances in general, Wayang Potehi is performed and shown with the aim of educating and entertaining the community. The story in Wayang Potehi depicts past history that is linked to the present.

Wayang Potehi is not widely spread throughout Indonesia. Wayang Potehi performances only exist in Java, especially Central Java and East Java (Trends, 2023b).



The center of the spread of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is on the islands of Java and Sumatra, covering 8 provinces. On the island of Java, the spread of ethnic Chinese is in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Banten, East Java, West Java, Central Java, and Jakarta. While in Sumatra, the spread is in Riau and North Sumatra (Trends, 2023a).



Wayang Potehi, as a symbol of resistance by the ethnic Chinese community, is performed in a satirical and sarcastic manner on the ethnic and racial discrimination experienced by the ethnic Chinese by ignoring the real meaning and has been done for years so that it has caused a bias in meaning. The purpose of performing Wayang Potehi is to defend the ethnic Chinese minority in Java.

Over the years, Wayang Potehi has acculturated with Javanese culture and collaborated with other artistic rhythms, such as traditional and modern arts. There are even human theatrical performances that combine Chinese art with local community art so that Wayang Potehi becomes part of the cultural identity of the Javanese people brought by the Chinese ethnic group. However, most Javanese people do not recognize Wayang Potehi because they think that it is not a local cultural art (Stenberg, 2015).

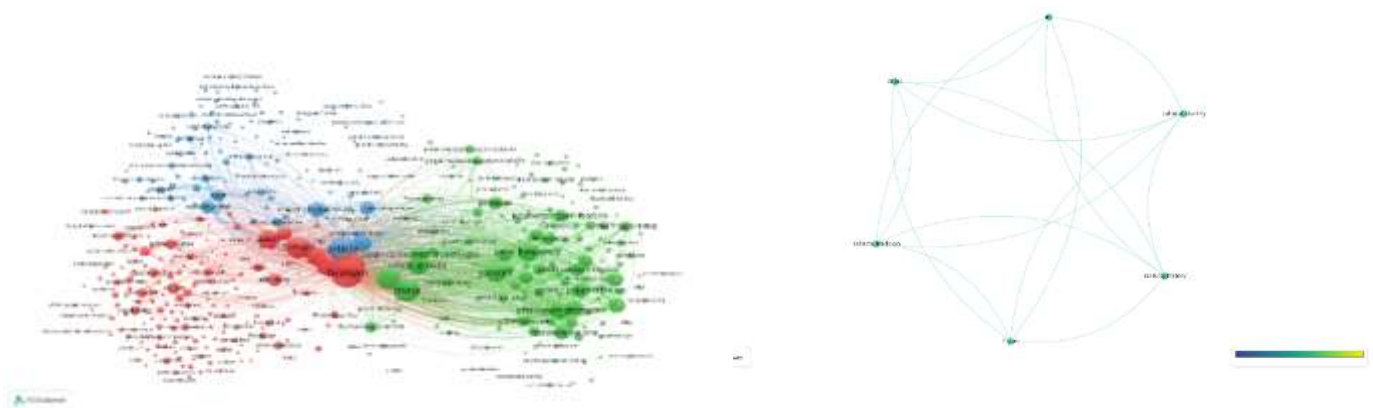
In Indonesia, Wayang Potehi is developing more rapidly than in its original country, China or Taiwan (Purwoseputro, 2014). This is because Indonesia has more diverse arts and is easy to acculturate with other cultures including Chinese ethnic culture, considering the existence of Chinese ethnicity in Java for centuries. In China and Taiwan, Wayang Potehi has not experienced much development, thus encouraging scientists and artists from China and Taiwan to conduct comparative studies on Wayang Potehi art in Java (Fushiki, 2022).

In Taiwan, the preservation of Wayang Potehi art is very lacking. In the Philippines, Wayang Potehi is performed for Confucian and Buddhist followers and is held in places of worship such as kelenteng and churches (Fushiki, 2022; Stenberg, 2020).

The bias of meaning in the Wayang Potehi performance has developed into a deviation in interpretation for certain groups. The goal is to fight other groups symbolically and is not known by many people. As a minority group, they will certainly lose if they physically compete with the majority group whose numbers are greater. Therefore, resistance is only carried out symbolically through Wayang Potehi and other Chinese art objects to maintain their cultural identity.

Based on the cases explained above, it can be concluded as a research problem that the bias of meaning in the Wayang Potehi performance delivered to the audience can be a wrong message and have a provocative meaning because of the bias of interpretation in it. In addition, the bias of meaning in the Wayang Potehi symbol has the potential for the continuation of racial conflict between the Chinese ethnic group and the majority community in Java. There is an assumption that discrimination cannot be eliminated. Therefore, it is interesting to study in depth the bias of meaning in Wayang Potehi and its connection to the resistance of the Chinese ethnic group against racial discrimination in Java.

Only a few previous studies have linked the bias of meaning in Wayang Potehi and the racial conflicts experienced by ethnic Chinese in Java and several countries in the world. This can be seen in the following research gap.



**Figure 1.** Results of Bibliometric Analysis of Research Gaps in Wayang Potehi and Chinese Ethnic Racial Conflict

Source: VosViewer -Peneliti, 2023

The novelty in this study is that this study examines the use of bias of meaning in Wayang Potehi symbols as a form of resistance by the Chinese ethnic group against racial conflict and ethnic discrimination using a critical paradigm approach. The purpose of this study is to reinterpret the biased meaning in symbols or figures in Wayang Potehi and to dismantle the ideology of meaning in Wayang Potehi and the struggle of the Chinese ethnic group in Java as an effort to maintain cultural identity.

The racial gap between the Chinese ethnic minority group and the local ethnic majority group is closely related to Identity Negotiation Theory. This theory builds knowledge on the communication processes used by individuals to communicate and negotiate their group identities and their relationships in a particular context. This theory argues that individual messages during interactions can contain many types of cultural identities such as nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, politics, and religion. Because individuals use multiple identities, all voices within each identity group do not speak the same way or are not recognized in the same way by others (Littlejohn, Stephen W & Foss, 2017).

Until now, the context of racism has been an ongoing study and a never-ending problem. In Critical Race Theory (CRT), a collection of studies that revolve around the study of race and racism, it is stated that racist thoughts and practices are specific and based on history and context. This dynamic requires scientists to pay attention to the various manifestations. In addition, according to CRT, regardless of race, class, and gender, everyone will be treated the same way, but in this case, ignoring the fact that race, class, and gender are different for each person (Littlejohn, Stephen W. & Foss, 2016).

## Research Method

This qualitative research uses a descriptive type with a critical ethnographic approach, a cultural study that responds to ongoing social issues, such as discrimination against minority groups in the form of inequality of rights, gender and power (Creswell, 2015). This approach is taken to explore the cultural identity of the Chinese ethnic group in Java and also the forms of negotiation carried out by ethnic minorities in the midst of the majority group.

This research was conducted in several locations. The first was in Gudo, Jombang, East Java, the largest center for empowerment and preservation of Wayang Potehi in Java. The second was at the center for preserving Wayang Potehi in Semarang, Central Java. The third was in kelenteng or places of worship for followers of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in Surabaya, West Jakarta and Kampung Sewan, Banten.

Secondary data collection was conducted through participant observation and literature study of Wayang Potehi art in Java and comparison with other countries. Meanwhile, primary data collection was conducted through participant observation and in-depth interviews with informants such as preservers of Wayang Potehi art and elders or kelenteng administrators. The key informant in this study was Toni Harsono, a preserver of the largest Wayang Potehi art in East Java and a chairman of Kelenteng Hong San Kiong, Jombang. Several informants interviewed were Budi Raharjo, a chairman of Kelenteng Hok An Kiong, Surabaya, East Java, and Rudy Phan, a chairman of Kelenteng Eng An Kiong, Malang, as well as several supporting informants who were victims of racism in Banten such as Sung Cok An, an activist of Wayang Potehi art and Chinese art in Surabaya, Silfanti from Kampung Sewan, and Vina from West Jakarta.

The ethnographic approach model used in this study consists of two stages. The first is cultural semiotics which is used to examine and analyze the symbols and signs in Wayang Potehi by selecting 5 main characters. The second is the semiotic model by Roland Barthes which is used to analyze the attribute symbols imposed on the characters being analyzed. The data analysis technique used to examine the culture of society is domain analysis and taxonomy as carried out in Spradley's Ethnographic Analysis (Spradley, 2007).



## Result and Discussion

In Indonesia, Wayang Potehi has undergone a change in function. Unlike the popularity of other wayang performances such as shadow puppets and masked puppets, which are preserved as the original culture of the people, especially in Java, and have become a national cultural identity, as well as often being used as the identity of certain local cultures. (Tayibnaxis et al., 2022). Initially, Wayang Potehi was performed to introduce Chinese puppetry, especially in Java. However, it eventually became a symbol of resistance by the Chinese ethnic minority group against racial discrimination and ethnic conflict. According to Budi Raharjo, the founder of the Wayang Potehi performance in Surabaya, Wayang Potehi was originally a Chinese art that was brought to Indonesia and introduced as Chinese culture. In the process, this art was able to acculturate with Javanese culture. However, over time, especially during the New Order, racial conflicts occurred and resulted in the expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Indonesia and the banning of Wayang Potehi performances everywhere.

*"At the beginning of the New Order era, Wayang Potehi was performed in secret. As a marginalized minority community, they then used all media to spread teachings of resistance against racism, especially to the government, in the form of criticism or satire."*

This was also experienced by Toni Harsono, the caretaker of Kelenteng Tri Dharma Hong San Kiong, Gudo, Jombang, East Java Province. Harsono said that during the New Order era, he had received a summons not to perform Wayang Potehi in Jombang as a form of support for the New Order regime at that time which was anti-Chinese.

*"We were once visited by unknown people. They gave a letter to Kelenteng containing a warning not to perform Wayang Potehi. They did not write any kind of threat, but a kind of warning not to perform the Chinese Wayang Potehi. Even though it was a routine performance held twice a month. Finally we made the performance irregularly, or only occasionally, once a month or once every two months."*

Harsono did not deny that there was discrimination against the Chinese ethnic group when performing Wayang Potehi which could only be held in certain places. Meanwhile, Wayang Kulit or Wayang Orang performances could be performed in big cities and spread throughout the countryside.

This is different from what happened in Taiwan at that time. In Taiwan, Wayang Potehi continued to develop and carried the characteristics of Taiwanese Potehi art. Wayang Potehi was preserved and performed freely as a local culture that could be accepted by all Taiwanese people. (Fushiki, 2022). Meanwhile, in Indonesia there was often resistance against the Chinese ethnic group. They considered that Wayang Potehi was not an original Indonesian culture but a foreign or immigrant culture that did not need to be developed and preserved.

As a form of resistance against racial discrimination, the Chinese ethnic group utilized Wayang Potehi by featuring figures of knights or heroes. The knight figure is always depicted as a hero who defends the Chinese ethnic community, while the antagonist character in Wayang Potehi is a foreigner who tries to colonize China. Furthermore, the scenario is played in the form of a Wayang Potehi drama with a previously designed division of roles.

According to Budi Raharjo, the knight figure is always depicted as a winner against a foreign nation that is interpreted as a colonizing nation. The knight figure then expresses various criticisms that are delivered verbally, symbolically, and figuratively that can entertain, arouse emotions, and even make people laugh. An example is the story of the war between China and Japan.

*"Communication was carried out without directly mentioning the incident or real name and was delivered poetically full of satire or sarcasm by creating fictional story characters. The story was engineered in such a way that it would not be easily known by many people, especially when there were regime spies. There was once a disbandment of the Wayang Potehi performance at the Kelenteng, but we did not give up. The performance was still held. We also had a responsibility to entertain the surrounding community."*

A similar statement was also made by Rudy Phan, the head of Kelenteng Eng An Kiong, Malang, East Java. He said that during the New Order era, the performance of Wayang Potehi at Kelenteng Eng An Kiong, Malang was very limited. The Wayang Potehi performance was held secretly in the inner courtyard of the Kelenteng and was limited only to worshippers.

*“Unlike the current conditions, Wayang Potehi performances can be opened to the public. During the New Order, Wayang Potehi performances were very limited and could only be watched by Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist communities who were worshipping at the Kelenteng.”*

Wayang Potehi performances were often held inside the Kelenteng Eng An Kiong, precisely in front of the main entrance gate of the place of worship for Confucians, Taoists and Buddhists. Rudy Phan often contacts Toni Harsono, the chairman and caretaker of the Kelenteng Hong San Kiong and also the preserver of Jombang Potehi Wayang who regularly performs Potehi Wayang at the Kelenteng Eng An Kiong. Rudy said that the tension between ethnic Chinese and local people in Jakarta before the fall of Governor Ahok in 2017 also had an impact in Malang. This was because many groups, claiming to be Islamic organizations, often made threats, either in the form of violence or intervention, to the Kelenteng to stop all forms of religious worship activities, including the Wayang Potehi performances.

*“There was a threat, but not from the surrounding community. However, I still carried out worship according to the mandate of the congregation. I could not stop worship activities here because it would disappoint many parties. That's why I continued to carry out worship, because the conflict was out there, not in this Kelenteng. I still let the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist people worship as they should. I provided a comfortable place and facilities and avoided racial conflict.”*

Although there are no longer any barriers between the Chinese ethnic group and the local community, the gap can still occur in everyday life, especially in social interactions. In addition, in terms of marriage, the Chinese ethnic group does not want inter-racial and inter-faith marriages. As experienced by Vina, she was in a romantic relationship with her lover who was of local race, and she did not get permission from her family to marry.

In addition to racial or ethnic differences, other causes are prospective husband who does not have permanent or stable jobs, differences in social status, and differences in religion. In addition, the residents around their current residence do not want the presence of ethnic Chinese.

*“Because I was already in love with my husband, even though we were of different races, I chose to stay with my husband. In addition, I also changed my religion, from Buddhism to Islam, so that I could marry my husband. My family already had a dogma to marry within the same race and religion. That's why I couldn't follow my family, and I chose to follow my husband's religion.”*

The New Order era passed and the reform era arrived in 1999. Although there were no longer any living barriers between the local and Chinese races, racial conflict occurred again when the former Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahja Purnama (Ahok), who led Jakarta from 2014 to 2017, was caught in a case of blasphemy (Putra, 2019). This conflict was very much felt in Kampung Sewan, Banten. Silfanti, a Chinese-Indonesian girl who was also a victim of racism, said that there had been a conflict in Kampung Sewan but it did not lead to physical clashes with the Chinese ethnic community.

At that time, the local people's bad treatment of the Chinese ethnic group was getting out of control. They bullied and harassed Chinese women in Banten. Silfanti had a bad experience when she was passing a group of local teenagers she didn't know. She was harassed with catcalling, swearing with Chinese words as insults in a high tone, calling her with animal words such as pig or pig smell, body shaming, and so on.

*“I felt uncomfortable with those words. I felt insulted and harassed. They were very racist when they met a Chinese girl like me. The Chinese people around me also experienced the same thing. In fact, there were many local people who had worked with Chinese people too. Since the Ahok case, people have become very racist. Even a group of people, who claimed to be an Islamic community organization, had stopped worship activities at the Kelenteng. They spread fear and conflict with the surrounding community.”*

The term "infidel" was continuously directed at the Chinese community in Kampung Sewan. The ethnic Chinese community in the area remained silent because they did not have the strength to fight back. Fortunately, there was no conflict or physical violence that resulted in loss of life. However, there was disharmony in society.

*“At that time, it seemed like there had been a separation of groups that could not be reunited. Therefore, the Chinese community who had lived in Kampung Bayan for a long time did not have good relations with the local people and tended to live with their own group.”*

Racial conflict in West Java and Banten is quite high. Overall, in 2021, according to Data Setara Institute, there was a decrease in the number of violations of freedom of religion and belief. In 2020, there were 180 incidents of violations and 424 acts of violation. Meanwhile, in 2021, there were 171 incidents of violations and 318 acts of violation. This is what causes the gap between the Chinese minority group and the local majority group to be quite high (Putro Yahya Aryanto et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the Arab ethnic minority group tended to be more respected because they taught Islam in the surrounding area and had similarities in terms of religious beliefs and activities. They were considered descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and had the title Sayyid as the great ruler (Batubara et al., 2020). The presence of the Chinese ethnic group, most of whom are adherents of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, is considered to have colonized the property rights of indigenous people and this stigma is very strong in Indonesia, especially in Java.

#### *Symbols of the Knight in Wayang Potehi*

The symbols of the knight are integrated with the principles of life of the Chinese ethnic community, especially for Taoists and Confucians. These chivalry symbols are used to motivate and fortify themselves from different racial groups that are considered colonialism. Therefore, the bias of meaning in Wayang Potehi has developed into a symbol of resistance of the Chinese ethnic group against racial discrimination in Java.

The bias of meaning that occurs in Wayang Potehi also comes from the ignorance of the young generation of ethnic Chinese towards the Chinese art of Wayang Potehi in Java. Most young people do not know about it because they consider it an old culture that is not popular.

The characters in Wayang Potehi depict the life of social intrigue of Chinese society. The selection of these characters and figures has been done since the Dutch colonial era. One of them is Kwan Kong, commonly known as Guan Yu, Guan Gong, Guan Li, or Kwan Kung. Guan Yu is a famous figure in Chinese culture.

Guan Yu was a general and war hero who lived during the Three Kingdoms era in ancient China. Guan Yu was highly respected for his integrity, bravery, and loyalty. He was also considered a god and god of war by many people. Temples were built throughout China and other Chinese regions to honor him. The bias of meaning that is often misunderstood is a chivalrous figure who eradicates colonialists outside China, so that everyone outside of Chinese ethnicity is considered a colonizer. Chinese society needs to emulate Guan Yu as a symbol of war against racial colonialism. However, this is certainly biased because the symbol of Guan Yu's chivalry and heroism is general and does not favor one race only.

Judging from the denotational meaning, Guan Yu has a large body, strong hands, a mustache that extends to his chest, thick eyebrows, and curly eyelashes. He wears typical ancient Chinese clothing and a *tatung* crown, or commonly known as *tatung kwan kung*. The weapon he uses is a machete or *Dao* which is equipped with a stick as a grip, better known as Gun Dao or Blue Dragon Spike. This weapon has become the main character in the history of Guan Yu, symbolizing courage, agility and strength against evil, as well as the spirit of never giving up.



Physically, Guan Yu looks fierce. Even some people consider him bad or evil. But connotatively, Guan Yu has a noble and loving character. He loves and protects his people and has high loyalty to his master, Liu Bei. In addition, he also feels indebted and owes his life to himself and to his enemies.

As said by Toni Harsono, a puppeteer who often performs Wayang Potehi with the character Guan Yu:

*“Guan Yu's typical body and face, including the weapons used and the clothes worn are fixed and cannot be changed. The weapon he uses is Guan Dao, which is so light but strong. Guan Yu's characteristics describe his nature and character. Guan Yu is a loyal, loving, friendly person who likes to help oppressed people. For some ethnic Chinese people, Guan Yu is considered to have provided protection and a role model. Some people consider Guan Yu as a God, but others see him as an exemplary knight for the ethnic Chinese people.”*

Not much different from the character of Guan Yu, Bao Zheng, or better known as Justice Bao, was a judge and statesman from the Song Dynasty. His real name was Pau Chin or Pau Bun Chin, who was later called Pau Kong/Bao. He then got the nickname Judge Bao or fair judge. He is a much-loved character who upholds justice in the story of Ban Hoa Lau, or "Pavilion of 10,000 Flowers." He was also a wise judge and a famous statesman during the Northern Song Dynasty (999-1062).

Denotatively, Bao is depicted as having almost the same physical characteristics as Guan Yu, such as a large body, thick eyebrows, a thick mustache extending to his chest, and the hat he wears. The difference is that Bao has a birthmark on his forehead in the shape of a crescent moon.

Judge Bao is depicted as an unarmed knight who only relies on fair attitudes and actions. In passing sentences on crimes, he is impartial and does not look at a person's position or title. He prioritizes justice for goodness and honesty.

According to Ardian Purwoseputro, a young researcher of Chinese ethnicity from East Java and a preserver of Wayang Potehi culture, before there were scientific works on the depiction of Wayang Potehi, this art was once a symbol of resistance for the Chinese ethnic community to uphold justice and racial equality by twisting the role of the characters in Wayang Potehi itself. Bao is a figure who is often associated with the character of emancipation, justice and racial equality because of his role as a judge who upholds justice without discrimination.

As a chivalrous and fair figure in legal proceedings, Bao received a gift from Emperor Song Renzong of Bian in the form of three guillotines or beheading tools depicting a dog's head which meant to punish the common people, a tiger's head to punish corrupt officials, and a dragon's head to punish the nobility.

The dog is depicted as a figure who is always on the streets and can mingle with other people and is considered an ordinary person. The tiger is depicted as a strong and powerful figure, a corrupt official who uses his power to steal and control other people tyrannically. The dragon is depicted as a figure who has power over everything or strong nobility. (Purwoseputro et al., 2014).

According to Ardian, by featuring the character of Bao, the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia, especially in Java, emphasizes the demand for fair treatment in social relations, work, and organizations. Finally, the deviation from the bias of the meaning of Bao is misinterpreted as resistance to foreign races and justice for the Chinese ethnic group. Ardian said:

*“In addition to being smart and intelligent, Judge Bao is also compassionate, especially towards the common people or oppressed people. As a wise, just and firm figure, Judge Bao is considered a knight without weapons and without martial arts skills in the Chinese Wayang Potehi character. However, because of the inter-ethnic conflict, the character attached to Bao has changed into a character of justice and executioner for colonization.”*

Another knight figure was Si Jin Kwie, a famous figure from the Tay Tong Tya Kingdom during the early Tang Dynasty. (618-907 AD). The three-headed, six-armed supernatural figure accompanied by a horde of demons who was able to destroy enemy defenses and had the ability to transform into Sam Thou Liok Pie

was Yo Hoan, a warlord from Se Liang Kok. He was defeated by Hoan Le Hoa by cutting off his six arms with a sword. Chu Gai was a war general from the Se Liang Kok Kingdom who was intercepted by Tiau Kambing Go by ringing the Liap Hun Leng bell in the story "Si Jin Kui Cheng Se", or Xue Rengui's Conquest of the West." (Purwoseputro et al., 2014)

The figure of Si Jin Kwie is a symbol of wisdom and spirituality. Denotatively, the physical appearance of Si Jin Kwie is thinner and slimmer. Despite his slim body, he is very agile and has a wide variety of martial arts moves. In every appearance he always wears a white robe, or commonly known as qi pao, with a dragon or phoenix motif with a belt. This outfit is also often displayed with light combat armor. Toni Harsono said:

*“The figure of Si Jin Kwie is the most frequently featured figure in Wayang Potehi performances and is idolized by the audience because he is a handsome knight and has high supernatural powers that other knights do not have. As a wise figure, he does not like the colonization of the Chinese nation, especially those in the West.”*

Overall, the characters in Wayang Potehi are good, firm, and brave knights. They always build humane behavior and uphold the dignity of a knight.

The clothes worn by Si Jin Kwie symbolize courage, strength, and purity by highlighting the white color. It can be said that Si Jin Kwie is a gentle knight figure, but has high courage and a strong attitude of resistance (Kuardhani, 2018).

The Chinese ethnic community uses the figure of Si Jin Kwie as a motivator to always dare to face racial discrimination carried out by the local community. This deviation of symbolism is often displayed in Wayang Potehi performances which are performed in Hokkien or Khek so that they are not understood by the local community, with the aim of deceiving the meaning and significance of the figures in Wayang Potehi itself.

According to Sung Cok An, a Chinese art activist from Surabaya, Si Jin Kwie is also often misinterpreted as the wisdom of the Chinese community that is disturbed by foreign colonialism, so a firm stance is needed by Si Jin Kwie to fight the oppression of the Chinese community. The Wayang Potehi performance featuring the character of Si Jin Kwie often invites controversy because it is used as a form of resistance against discrimination against the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia. Therefore, improvements are needed so that there are no deviations from the original Wayang Potehi story.

According to Toni Harsono, there is a need to preserve Wayang Potehi, not only in terms of its physical appearance but also the purity of its content as an original Chinese art that expanded to Java. In addition, it is necessary to maintain the character and attributes that are in accordance with the actual characterization of Wayang Potehi.

#### *Resistance against Discrimination by Ethnic Chinese*

In the Wayang Potehi performance in Java, there has been a bias of meaning through misinterpretation. The Wayang Potehi performance is actually just entertainment, but then it is used as a symbol of resistance that deviates from the original story. The three knight figures in Wayang Potehi have been used as symbols of strength and resistance against the colonial race or foreign race that is considered an enemy even though it is a local community.

The resistance of the Chinese community in Indonesia, especially in Java, against ethnic discrimination was carried out not only through violence or physical force that injured each other, but also through trade, business, and the performance of works of art such as Wayang Potehi, considering their existence as a minority group (Wasitaatmadja, 2020).

The Wayang Potehi performance was used by ethnic Chinese, Taoist and Confucian adherents, to fight ethnic discrimination in Java by manipulating the characters in the Wayang Potehi performance to create

bias of meanings for the benefit of certain groups (Istiqomah & Widiyanto, 2020). Racial and ethnic diversity in Indonesia is vulnerable to the emergence of racial disparities or racial discrimination, because there is an assumption that foreign races or immigrants are trying to dominate local or indigenous communities.

In fact, the term "indigenous" has long been no longer used because it contains racial discrimination conflicts. However, the term reappeared when Ahok ran for governor of Jakarta and was caught in a blasphemy case.

The Chinese ethnic group spread across cities on Java Island, such as Surabaya, Semarang, Banten, and Jakarta, is a minority group. They do not have the power to fight the local community physically. Therefore, they dominate in other ways, such as trade and education. In addition, they also use art, such as Wayang Potehi, to convey messages to the audience. They convey hidden messages that contain ideologies related to the supremacy of the Chinese ethnic race or as a superior race in Java. Meanwhile, the local race is the race with the lowest degree (Henthorn & Deutsch, 2007).

The form of identity negotiation carried out by the Chinese ethnic community is by mingling with the local community in various sectors, such as trade or business, education, arts, and other social activities. According to Ting Toomey, in differences in identity, people will state that the Chinese ethnic group is a race that has the right to obtain equal justice. They also have the power to maintain their identity in the local community. They then try to blend in with the local community even though discrimination still remains (Toomey, 1999).

There is an attempt by the Chinese ethnic group to challenge self-identification. They do this by biasing the meaning of the symbolization of art. They disguise the symbols in Wayang Potehi and utilize hidden meanings. Although not popular in society, they do not stop performing Wayang Potehi and utilize it to convey hidden meanings related to symbolic resistance to local society. They use Cantonese or Hokkien as the language of instruction so that only a few local audiences can understand the meaning of the dialogues. The dialogues are conveyed by the puppeteer orally from behind the stage while playing the Potehi puppets in both hands.

Nothing is set aside regarding the characteristics of the characters played. However, in the storytelling, the message conveyed is often not in accordance with its purpose to introduce the art of Wayang Potehi. There is an ethnic ideology inserted into the symbols of Wayang Potehi characters, including the principles of the Chinese ethnic community that play a role in it, to gain emancipation for the Chinese ethnic group.

Religious ideologies, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, are often used to support the storytelling of Wayang Potehi which tends to fight against injustice and racial discrimination in groups with local communities. By utilizing the Wayang Potehi performance, the puppeteer conveys messages of resistance from the Chinese ethnic group against discrimination and injustice and follows the bias of the meaning in it by exploiting the local community's ignorance of Hokkien or Cantonese.

## Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussions that have been presented above, it can be concluded that Wayang Potehi is basically a pure Chinese art that tells the story of the heroism and struggles of Chinese knights, most of whom are also considered gods and role models for the Chinese people. However, due to racial discrimination, especially in Java, which has the potential to cause high levels of racism, Chinese ethnic groups try to avoid physical conflict. They resist racial discrimination in their surrounding communities in a hidden or invisible way. This is done through a semiotic tradition that emphasizes the bias of meaning and deviation of symbols in Wayang Potehi to provoke Chinese ethnic groups that the treatment of local people towards them is a form of colonization.

Wayang Potehi is often performed in religious activities, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The message conveyed by the puppeteer behind the stage is in the form of verbal communication using

Cantonese or Hokkien. In addition, the message conveyed is also in the form of non-verbal communication through the Potehi glove puppet show. Through this medium, resistance is conveyed with a biased meaning by ignoring the real meaning. Justice, which should be common to all mankind, has been transformed into justice and power belonging to the Chinese ethnic community alone, ignoring people outside the ethnic group and even considering it as colonialism.

The cultural negotiation that they often use is to show self-identification as a stronger and more dominant ethnic group even though in reality they are a minority group. They negotiate their identity by blending in and interacting socially with the local community and adjusting their language, culture, arts and business so that their resistance is not visible and only through symbolic messages.

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In this statement there is no potential conflict of interest arising from this paper including those reported by the author.

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