

# WAYANG KULIT IN CIREBON

by Matthew Isaac Cohen



**The pockmarked Cungkring (right), one of the nine principal clown-servants of Cirebonese wayang kulit, seeks mystical knowledge from an elderly sage**

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# WAYANG KULIT IN CIREBON

## Part 1 - Setting the scene

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*Wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre) in Java does not refer to a unitary, monolithic art form. Many regional variants exist, or have existed in the recent past. In Java today, there are four main regional centres with vital shadow puppet traditions: Surakarta (also known as Solo), Yogyakarta (Yogya), Banyumas and Cirebon (Cerb). The variants associated with central Java - the Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Banyumas multiforms - are closely related in terms of puppet iconography, manipulation techniques, musical accompaniment, dramatic structure, repertoire, language, ritual features, and patterns of sponsorship. Surakarta and Yogyakarta *wayang kulit*, in particular, are taught in conservatoires for the performing arts, well-represented on national television, enacted regularly for tourists, and sent abroad to cultural festivals.

Much less familiar to puppet enthusiasts outside Java is the shadow puppet theatre of the Cirebon area, which differs from the better known puppet theatres of central Java in many respects. There are no regularly scheduled performances for tourists; the art is not taught at conservatoires and never broadcast on national television. Until Taham performed this year in continental Europe, to the best of my knowledge, only one Cirebonese *dbalang* (shadow puppeteer) had ever performed abroad - Sudarga Leseke (d. 1999).

Some have assumed consequently that Cirebon's *wayang kulit* is an archaic form, lacking popularity or interest. Such could not be further from the truth. For the last seven years, I have been studying *wayang kulit* in the Cirebon area as a theatre anthropologist and a practising *dbalang*. I would like to outline some of its contextual and generic characteristics, indicate what makes it appealing to me and to other devotees and, finally, suggest some of the reasons for its relative obscurity in Indonesia's national puppetry scene and abroad.

### Wayang kulit in Cirebon: past and present

Cirebon, defined here as a cultural region, is a stretch of Java's north coast from Cilamaya in the west to Brebes in the east, characterised by a particular dialect of Javanese (Cirebon Javanese), a shared historical tradition revolving around an Islamic sultanate founded in the 15th century and existing to date, and distinctive customs and

mores. A recent estimate of the number of Cirebonese is five million, including major populations in the regencies of Krawang, Subang, Indramayu, Majalengka, Kuningan, Cirebon, and Brebes, and the municipality of Cirebon. The cultural region is bordered by the highlands of Sunda to the south, the Betawi area to the west,



and what people in Cirebon call 'eastern Java' to the east (people culturally oriented to the royal court cultures of Yogyakarta and Surakarta as the standard-keepers for all things Javanese).

There are many distinctive art forms practised in the Cirebon area, as well as those shared with its neighbouring cultural regions. The people of the northern littoral consider themselves Javanese, not Sundanese, although the proximity of Cirebon to Sunda, and many differences from 'the eastern Javanese', results in them being often typed by outsiders as Sundanese, or a mixture of Javanese and Sundanese.

The oldest Cirebonese text describing *wayang kulit* in performance is the Suluk Wujil, which survives in a redaction dated by scholars to 1607. The text describes the well-known play, Kresna Duta (Kresna, the Envoy), being performed by the puppeteer Sari for an audience that included two of Java's semi-legendary Islamic 'saints' or 'friends of God' (*wali*): Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Bonang. Continued literary interest in *wayang kulit* and its stories is apparent from Serat Kandha (Book of Tales) texts, combining *wayang kulit* mythology with tales of the Islamic prophets and local

history. It is believed that this genre of literature first developed in 17th century Cirebon.

There was strong interest among Cirebon's royal court elites in *wayang kulit* in the 18th and 19th centuries. Each of the royal courts and houses owned one or more sets of puppets, some of which still survive as sacred heirlooms. Village puppeteers were appointed as 'court puppeteers' and given titles, performance duties, and obligations for the care of puppets.

Manuscripts closely associated with the performance tradition, such as the Old Javanese Bratayuda (owned by many Cirebonese *dbalang* and quoted and translated in performance), were closely studied by noble elites and word lists were compiled to facilitate their reading. Mystical poems of Islam, or *suluk*, containing numerous allusions to shadow puppet theatre were circulated among the noble elite and other literati.

Interest in *wayang kulit* in Cirebon's royal court circles diminished at the end of the 19th century due to financial limitations, decline of traditional Javanese and the rise of modern Western education, and the appeal of European 'polite' entertainments and pastimes, such as balls, among Cirebon's noble elite, most of whom lived in the city of Cirebon. Today, few performances of *wayang kulit*, or any

other form of dance or drama, take place in the royal courts or the city of Cirebon as a whole.

In contrast, *wayang kulit* in the densely-inhabited agrarian hinterlands, fishing villages, and the small towns of the coastal plain has remained of vital significance. Performances occur in conjunction with the celebration of rites of passage (circumcisions, weddings) and communal events such as harvest festivals, village purification rites, ancestral commemorations at cemeteries, and fishing thanksgiving celebrations. There are villages where, even with the competition of today's modern media (television, radio, video and CD), 20 or 30 performances of *wayang kulit* are staged annually. Older folk say that in the performing season (March-November) in the recent past, the sounds of *wayang kulit* in performance could be heard nightly in some towns.

Performances in connection with a circumcision, wedding, or other rite of passage ensure good attendance and sizable donations of raw rice and cash from guests. Performances for communal events are necessitated by local tradition. Hiring a troupe costs approximately £50

to £150, and it is always incumbent upon a sponsor to provide refreshments and cigarettes. Night-time shows take place between 8.00pm and 3.00am. They are commonly preceded by daytime matinee shows running between 9.30am and 3.00pm (with a pause for the mid-day Islamic prayers). If the event is communally sponsored, it is normal for mandatory stories such as the birth of one of the incarnations of the rice goddess, or the origin of lightning and thunder, to be performed during the day.

Troupes are headed by a puppeteer, and might include 10 to 15 musicians and from two to six technical assistants, who are responsible for setting up, striking, and maintaining the performing equipment, including the sound system. The *dbalang* manipulates puppets, speaks all the dialogue and narration, provides sound effects with a wooden knocker and metal plates suspended to his (or her) left, sings mood songs, directs the gamelan, and acts as ritual officiant when a ritual drama is being performed. He also announces song requests and communiqués from the audience or host.

Some puppeteers and exegetes suggest that there should ideally be 17 musicians in a gamelan group, as there are 17 *rokaat* (ritual actions and prayers) conducted by a practising Muslim in the course of a day. Mulyaman, a cultural inspector for Palimanan, provides the following list of 17 musical instruments: kendang; gong; saron; gender; kenong; jengglong; penerus (demung); gambang; beri (cymbals) kebluk (kempyang); klenang (two small kettles, rarely used); kemanak; ketipung; bedug; bonang; kemyang (bonang panerus); suling. In addition a second saron might be added to play saron imbal. Also unmentioned are the ketuk, biol (fiddle) and titil (peking). The auspicious number 17 is an ideal to conform to in theory, but not generally in practice.

The musicians also function as the *dbalang*'s interlocutors, responding to dialogue with questions, interjections, and comments, often of a scatological nature. One of the musicians in the troupe acts as the matinee *dbalang*, typically a junior, aspiring performer or an older, semi-retired puppeteer related to the troupe's leader. Performances also prominently feature one or more *pesindhen* (female vocalists), who are usually free agents not attached to the troupe, but hired separately by the host.

There is, in fact,



A decorated buffalo head and other offerings on public display during a *nadranan*, thanksgiving celebration, sponsored annually by a fishing community, featuring a day-time ritual *wayang kulit* play entitled Budug Basu.

**Above right: Heirloom puppets of the royal house of Kacerbonan during the monthly isis (airing-out) enacted by the court puppeteer Kurnadi in 1993. Visible from left to right here are a variety of ponggawa (bold knight) puppets, Gonjaka (centre), Catrik, Togog, Curis (with the long neck), Temblem, and a female maid-servant. The basket in the background is where parts of the royal gamelan are stored.**

**The author performing a matinee show of Greeting Sri at a communal hall in conjunction with a rice-planting celebration. Hanoman (right) is shown addressing the animals of the forest, to the rapt attention of youthful spectators.**



● Continued overleaf

# WAYANG KULIT IN CIREBON

## Part 2 - Plays in performance

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Plays, with extemporised dialogue in Cirebon Javanese and Indonesian, are, as in most of the rest of Java, based largely on the characters and situations of the Mahabharata. Much less frequently, stories featuring Ramayana characters are performed, or stories featuring the descendents of Arjuna, a central protagonist of the Mahabharata. There is also an important set of stories featuring the ancestors of Divine Guru. Some of these 'old' stories feature Islamic prophets, including Adam, Seth, Solomon and Jesus.

Most puppeteers today own commonplace books in which they write down story outlines. Some also own published plays from Central Java or comic book adaptations of *wayang kulit* stories. But, until recently, stories were transmitted entirely orally and *dbalang* are still renowned for their phenomenal memories.

Performance structure is flexible. Performances always begin with an instrumental musical overture. Night-time shows are preceded by a battle demonstration performed by a musician or junior puppeteer from the audience. The play proper opens with an audience scene with a king or queen, or a hermitage scene with a holy man. A highly formulaic narration is recited and mood songs sung. Ceremonial exchanges of greetings are pronounced. An issue arises - a missing heirloom, an overly insistent suitor, a portentous dream, a mysterious plague. A guest arrives, sometimes an unwelcome one, and a fight breaks out. The play proceeds in like fashion for the rest of the night, alternating dialogue with battle. Some scenes emphasise courtly protocol and diplomatic intrigue; others, mystical philosophy, romance, or rough humour. Dialogue and battle are introduced by mood songs, which also serve to change the musical mode of the gamelan (up to five musical modes may be used in a performance).

Audience members send cash and song requests to the vocalist for the latest popular Cirebonese songs with titles like 'Bumping' and 'Too Much in Love', and also request that their names be cited in song by her. These songs interrupt the play frequently. While the song is being sung, the *dbalang* may choose to sit silently in front of the screen, smoking a cigarette, or he may use the songs as background music for a battle scene. Male audience members, many of whom are intoxicated, stand up and dance during these songs. Some of them have brought female escorts with them and insist that they dance as

well. Song requests and social dancing normally peter out around 2.00am or so.

The plot during the last hour progresses quickly, building towards the final all-out violent confrontation. A non-canonical *carangan* (branch) play always ends with unmaskings and transformations, as in a Shakespearian comedy. A canonical *galur* play ends with a formulaic statement that all endings are arbitrary and that the history of a certain character or kingdom is much longer than can be depicted in a single night. Before the *dbalang* can recite customary words, blessing the audience and sponsor, before the final musical piece rounding off the show is played by the gamelan, the audience is already dispersing and the vocalist counting her 'tips' and dividing a portion of her take among the musicians. No applause, no curtain calls, no bows.

### Appeal

*Wayang kulit* in Cirebon is a multi-dimensional art that is simultaneously classical and popular. Its combination of rough humour, high theatrics, Islamic philosophising, light music, and social dancing appeal to a broad spectrum of people in Cirebonese rural society. Spectators are familiar with Java's other puppet forms from television and radio broadcasts and Cirebonese puppeteers occasionally imitate puppet acrobatics, jokes, or stories from these media.

During the colonial period, many among Cirebon's bureaucratic elite were from central Java and sponsored performances of central Javanese *wayang kulit* troupes in conjunction with celebrations. Today, many are from the Sundanese highlands, and may occasionally sponsor Sundanese *wayang golek* (rod puppet theatre). Cirebon also has its tradition of *wayang golek*, known as *wayang golek cepak* or *wayang golek papak*, in which plays from Islamic history and local legend are enacted. (Sundanese



Above Arjuna and his wife, the long-haired Dewi Sumbadra, enjoy a moment of intimacy sleeping on their 'bed' (*pegulingan*) - represented by the *kayon*.

not one 'Cirebonese *wayang kulit*', but many local styles, centred in particular villages or regions. The vast majority of Cirebon's puppeteers are from puppeteer families, and skills and equipment are

transmitted generationally. One of the most famous styles today is the Gegesik style, associated with the agrarian town of Gegesik (population c. 20,000). This small town has 12 active professional troupes, including several of the most famous in Cirebon. Its musicians are renowned for their high degree of professionalism.

Another well-known regional style is the Southern style, associated with the southwestern part of the regency of Cirebon, in the vicinity of the industrial town of Palimanan. This style is distinguished by the use of a gamelan tuned to the heptatonic (*pelog*) scale; nearly all other *wayang kulit* styles use the pentatonic (*prawa*) tuning exclusively. Southern puppeteers frequently perform Islamic plays, such as Semar Lunga Kaji, in which the clown-servant Semar tries to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but is opposed by his Hindu brother, Divine Guru (Shiva to South Asians). Villages tend to have preferences for certain regional styles over others.

### Equipment

A set of puppets numbers typically between 130 and 200. Puppets are made out of carved and perforated dried buffalo hide, painted on both sides, and braced by a central support rod made from painted rattan or (less commonly) buffalo horn. Puppet carving and painting tends to be more expressive in Cirebon than in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, though with less attention to fine details. Cirebonese puppets tend to be more durable than those currently produced elsewhere in Java; one can find puppets in many sets dating back 50 or even 150 years. Few puppeteers are themselves carvers, but most spend long hours painting and doing minor repairs on the puppets they own.

Performances for communal events take place in a variety of settings, including cemetery pavilions and open-air reception areas of town halls. Performances for private functions take place on *panggung*, temporary stages elevated about four feet above the ground and covered with a tarp. Troupes generally arrive in the morning in a truck which is also used to transport the

performing equipment, including the sound system and the diesel generator which powers it. The *panggung* is normally rented by a host from a local service and is erected well before a troupe's arrival.

Setting up for the troupe takes about two hours. Along one side of the *panggung*, bamboo battens are lashed rectangularly to form a frame for the white cotton screen. Banana logs are arrayed horizontally in two adjacent rows about 18 inches above the planks of the *panggung*. Simultaneously, the gamelan instruments are unpacked and set up on the *panggung*. The puppet chest is placed to the left of centre, the lid taken off and placed to the right. Puppets in the chest are taken out and arrayed along the left and right sides of the banana log in order of size, leaving the central area blank except for a *kayon*, the spade-shaped 'tree-of-life' puppet icon. Some puppets are placed on top of the lid, a small number remain in the puppet chest. Arranged in such a way, all puppets can be retrieved in an instant by musicians or technical assistants at the *dbalang's* request during a performance.

Microphones are placed inside or adjacent to the musical instruments and the sound checked. Before night-time shows, the white cotton screen is stretched tightly along the bamboo frame with cord, and spiked into the banana logs; the light source (traditionally an oil lamp, more frequently today an electric light bulb) is suspended screen-centre by metal chains. (No screen or light is used for daytime shows.) The light is placed so that it hovers above the head of the *dbalang*. It must be able to swing back and forth and rotate during performances. Cirebonese puppeteers place enormous stress on shadow effects and use the light in various subtle and creative ways. A *dbalang* goes to great lengths to ensure that the shadow of his hand is not visible as he manipulates puppets before the screen.

Performance spaces differ considerably; not all *panggung* are the same size and trees and overhangs from buildings constrain the physical setup in certain ways. This means that the arrangement of the equipment must be flexible. Many puppeteers carry bamboo battens and screens of different sizes to accommodate unknown performance conditions. Small spaces mean that puppets not in use might be draped over strings instead of arrayed in banana logs, or that some musicians will be playing on a patio or on an extension of the stage instead of on the *panggung* proper. A downpour of rain means that the speakers and puppets have to be covered with plastic sheets. All of this is normal, and expected by the troupe.

The second part of this article will appear in the March issue.

Photographs: Matthew Isaac Cohen and Aviva Kartiningsih Cohen



A night-time performance by a Gegesik troupe in a communal hall in the town of Gegesik. Children of dhalang learn how to perform from infancy; the son of puppeteer-musician Sudarso sits on his lap as he plays *jengglong/kenong* to accompany his elder brother, also a puppeteer. In Gegesik style *wayang* the *kenong* and *jengglong* are usually played by the same person.

A night-time performance by the Gegesik *dhalang* Basari of the classic play, Arjuna Sasrabau. Somantri (left) is challenging his lord and king Arjuna Sasrabau (right) to a duel of chariots, demanding the puppeteer's simultaneous manipulation of four puppets. Note the improvised electrification of the oil lamp.



A drunken spectator (standing) requests a song from a bemused vocalist, who covers her mouth to hide her laughter. Note the presence of a seeing-impaired violinist, who doubles as the group's suling player.





**The quick-to-anger Baladewa (left) castigates his brother Kresna (right) for failing to consult him about the upcoming marriage of Kresna's daughter in the classic *galur* play, Parta Krama, The Marriage of Arjuna. A fight will shortly break out between Baladewa and the commander of Kresna's armed forces Padmanegara (also known as Secaki) who is seated here respectfully behind his king. The puppeteer is Grami and this 1993 performance is at the house of Elang Djoni, a high-ranking member of the royal house of Kanoman, dance instructor and a devotee of Cirebonese art.**

**Kresna (left) and Semar (right) discourse in a 1993 performance by the puppeteer Darmabhakti.**



rod puppet theatre draws its stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana). But none of these enjoy a fraction of the popularity of Cirebon's own *wayang kulit*.

I have often asked Cirebonese spectators why they attend *wayang kulit* performances. Everyone seems to have their own particular constellation of reasons. The language used by puppeteers is readily accessible to spectators, far more so than in Java's other shadow puppet theatres. Puppeteers make it a point to gloss 'difficult' words and provide thorough explanations of concepts in order to communicate effectively with audiences. At every performance, there is at least a handful of spectators genuinely interested in following the story as it unfolds. They will sit in relative silence from early in the evening until late at night, generally watching from the shadow side of the screen. Such devotees often talk of an interest in 'history' (or what we would call mythology). Many more enjoy the social ambience of performances: the food stalls, drinking, and relaxed socialising. Others speak of their love of music or sexual attraction to a singer. Children, in particular, enjoy the excitement of shows: the pounding rhythms of the gamelan, the quick-paced battles.

Nearly everyone delights in the comedy of the clown-servants (*panakawan, wulucumbu*). There are nine main clowns in Cirebon's *wayang kulit*: Semar, his seven children and grandchildren (Bagal Buntung, Bagong, Bitarota, Ceblok, Cungkring, Duwala, Gareng), and Semar's brother-in-law, Curis (also known as Sekar Pandan). Some plays feature only a subset of three or four of the clowns, but a scene set in Karang Tumaritis, the hamlet where Semar is headman, will involve the whole lot, plus typically Sudiragen, Semar's devoted wife.

The clown-servants are readily distinguishable by their voices and deformities to all devotees, and are commonly the central characters in 'branch' stories, clowning it up from the first scene to the last. Each has his own special proclivities.

The dwarfish Bagong usually speaks in Sundanese (barely understood by anyone else), while bent-armed Duwala (sometimes understood to be Chinese) speaks in highfalutin' Indonesian. The pot-bellied Ceblok plays the cowardly lion, aggressive and angry but always first to run at the first sign of danger. Hobbling Bitarota mumbles

caustic remarks about one and all. Bagal Buntung, who lacks one leg, delights in physical cruelty and practical jokes. Gareng speaks for youth; though small in stature and with a body twisted in knots, he never fears harm, even when he should. Cungkring is always curious, sticking his nose into matters that don't concern him and questing for mystical knowledge beyond his comprehension. Curis is the butt of everyone's joke, the last to catch on, but (like Semar) a god in disguise.

Rotund Semar himself is a bundle of contradictions: god and servant, old and young, wise and foolish. He accompanies, serves, counsels, and defends his masters, the Pendhawa brothers (and their ancestors and descendents before and after them), through thick and thin. Semar is not a trickster, as has sometimes been suggested, but an ambulatory trick; the incarnation of the droll god Munged (also known as Ismaya), older brother of Divine Guru. In the middle world of humans, his presence never fails to foul up the most dastardly of schemes launched against his masters.

The best puppeteers are able to weave stories that feature elements of interest to all. They allude to contemporary politics, discourse on mysticism or types of women, stage dramatic battles fought over agonistic high ideals, and improvise pornographic jokes at the spur of the moment. Well-trained vocalists can do all the latest popular Cirebonese songs and can sing in the regional styles of Sunda, Central Java, and Betawi, as well as in the national pop *dangdut* style.

Singers also know all the prominent spectators by name, and flirt with many in the course of the night. The tireless musicians, performing day and night, maintain a high level of energy to ensure the creation and projection of the appropriate *ramé* (lively) atmosphere. They sing, play their instruments with gusto, shout response cries to and zany comments on the *dbalang's* dialogue, sometimes put on masks and dance, and are constantly clowning it up for the audience - insulting each other and hitting each other on the head with their mallets. The total art is live and immediate. Spectators don't just sit and watch, they approach the stage to request songs, ask a musician or the *dbalang* a question, and flirt with the vocalist or the drummer (a virtuostic musician who is commonly a sex object for female spectators). The atmosphere is intimate, and directly relevant and responsive to local concerns, interests, and passions.

### Locality

The reasons why Cirebonese *wayang kulit* is relatively obscure outside of Cirebon are related to why it is so popular in this area of Java. One important factor is language. The dialect of Javanese originally associated with the court city of Surakarta spread throughout much of central and eastern Java as 'normative' Javanese beginning in the colonial period. Surakarta's

dialect of Javanese is the Javanese taught in schools and published in books and magazines. Cirebon Javanese, on the other hand, is limited mostly to one stretch of Java's coast, with a few pockets of migrant speakers elsewhere in Java and Sumatra. Within this language area, there are numerous sub-dialects, for little effort has been made to standardise Cirebon Javanese. This means that Surakarta's puppeteers speak a tongue linguistically accessible to a large number of Javanese, while Cirebon's are more closely associated with particular locales.

Another factor is Indonesian national aesthetics. The *wayang kulit* varieties of Surakarta and Yogyakarta are heavily inflected by long association with the royal courts, which ran training programmes for puppeteers and were active sponsors. This gives *wayang kulit* of south central Java a classical aesthetic. Stories, which are always in three acts, develop at a snail's pace, with many scenes that are extrinsic to the basic plot; language is archaic, flowery, and obscure; puppets are intricately carved but not easily distinguishable from one another from far distances; musical pieces are complexly stratified and highly polyphonic, but not very lively on the whole.

Such an aesthetic suited the dominant ideology of the Soeharto period (1966-1998), when genuine political activity was banned and replaced instead by the five principles of monotheism, just and civilised humanity, national unity, deliberation instead of voting, and social justice, known collectively as the state ideology of Pancasila. Indeed, the idealised ordered and prosperous kingdom ruled by a just king described in the *dbalang's* opening narration (which can take nearly an hour in central Java!) is precisely the image activated by President Soeharto to represent his own regime. Cirebon's *wayang kulit*, always oriented towards the contingencies of the performative moment, rowdy, unpredictable, and highly oriented to the clowns, is antithetical to such a project.

The fame enjoyed by the *wayang kulit* of Surakarta and Yogyakarta outside Indonesia is related as well to the large numbers of foreigners who have engaged in practical study of the performing arts of these court centres. Interest dates back at least to the late colonial period, when a number of Europeans, including

Claire Holt and Helena Leodiman, studied dance in Surakarta and Yogyakarta from noble dance masters such as Tejukusumo. Around the same time, Jaap Kunst, considered by some to be the father of modern ethnomusicology, initiated a programme for teaching gamelan to foreigners in the Netherlands that was later widely imitated in the United States. Devoted American students of *wayang kulit*, including Roger Long and Marc Hoffman, were attracted, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s; other nationalities followed. There are clear incentives for foreign artists to study in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, including well-established training institutions, text-books, and experienced teachers.

The performing arts of Cirebon, in contrast, are not oriented towards teaching non-natives. Only a handful of foreign students have seriously studied Cirebonese performance of any sort. Most of these have been dance students interested in Cirebon's distinctive *topeng* (mask-dance); as far as I know, I am the first foreigner to pursue practical studies in Cirebonese *wayang kulit*. This means that Cirebonese performance, and particularly *wayang kulit*, has far fewer backers for tours abroad, international recording projects, and the like, in comparison with the arts of central Java.

Other factors can be identified as well, including quirks of the recording industry, an affinity between hippie and new-age philosophy with central Javanese theosophy, the relatively low number of high-placed government officials of rural Cirebonese descent, the low formal education of most Cirebonese performers, and the location of Cirebon in West Java, a province which is dominated by ethnic Sundanese.

There are signs that the cultural domination of central Java is ending now, as Indonesia enters a new democratic era. We shall see if this political shift potentiates increased visibility of 'minority' art forms like Cirebon's *wayang kulit* on national and international stages. ■

**Photographs: Matthew Isaac Cohen**



**The clown servant Duwala (right) squares off against a *pongawa* (bold knight) in a 1994 performance by the puppeteer Artadaya. Note the careful placement of the shadows in this battle scene.**

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