Reinterpretation of the Ramayana in Indonesia : A Consideration of the Comic Works of R. A. Kosasih

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Research Notes
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Reinterpretation of the Ramayana in Indonesia: A Consideration of the Comic Works of R. A. Kosasih

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インドネシアにおけるラーマーヤナの再解釈
──R. A. コサシのコミックに関する考察──

福　岡　まどか

The Indian epic poem the Ramayana has become widespread throughout many regions of Southeast Asia, being adopted as the main theme in various performing art forms such as theatre, dance drama, and mask dance up to the present day. In Indonesia, the art forms include *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets), *wayang golek* (rod puppets) and *sendratari* (dance drama).

This study takes up the subject of the Ramayana epic poem in Indonesian comic works, indicating their characteristic structures and plots. Among the Indonesian comic books, the works of R. A. Kosasih (1919–2012) are the best-known and most successful. His comic style is called *komik wayang* because of its close relationship to *wayang* theatre. Kosasih adopted many episodes from the *wayang* tradition, but dealt with them in his own way. He intentionally changed the episodes and developed his own adaptation of the Ramayana tale. In the process he created a new version that is not peculiar to any specific region such as Java, Sunda or Bali. Through the production of comic books, Kosasih succeeded in presenting the entire plot of Ramayana in a unique manner.

この研究はインドネシアのコミックにおける叙事詩ラーマーヤナを取り上げてその特徴を考察するものである。叙事詩ラーマーヤナは東南アジアに広く普及し，書承による伝承にとどまらず多くの上演芸術のジャンルにおいても主

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要な題材となってきた。この論考ではインドネシアにおいて1950年代以降に
出版されたコサシ（R. A. Kosasih 1919–2012）によるコミック・ワヤン（*komik
wayang*「ワヤン風のコミック」の意）と呼ばれるコミックを取り上げる。この
コミックは魅力的な画像とともにインドネシア語の地語りとセリフのテクスト
を用いている。ラーマーヤナを描いた作品には作者コサシの改変や創作による
独自の内容が見られる。コサシの作品は特定の地域的な枠組みを越えた多くの
人々にラーマーヤナの全体像を提示したという点において重要なメディアの一
つとして位置づけられる。

1　Introduction

　　The ancient Indian epic poem the Ramayana has become widespread in almost
all countries of Southeast Asia, not only as written text in novels, translations, or
adaptations but also in various performing art forms such as theatre, rod puppets,
shadow play, dance drama, and through various mass media, such as drama, film,
and television in contemporary times[1]. The main plot of the Ramayana depicts Prince
Rama's fight with the demon king Rahwana, who kidnaps Rama's beautiful wife,
Sinta. With the help of the monkey army, Rama defeats Rahwana and rescues Sinta[2].

　　In Indonesia, different versions of the Ramayana are attributed to various his-
torical circumstances, regions, and artistic genres. According to Aoyama (1998:
140–150), there are two streams of Ramayana stories. After considering extant
historical materials, Aoyama showed that the first version in Java, which appeared
during the Hindu-Java era, resembled its classical Indian version (Aoyama 1998:
141). Today, the Javanese perform this version in dance theatre, or *sendratari*. This
dance drama is called "the Ramayana ballet" and is presented mainly for apprecia-
tion by tourists. On the other hand, Javanese shadow play (*wayang kulit*) and puppet
theatres (*wayang golek*) perform a Ramayana similar to the modern version, derived
from the *Serat Khanda*, which became widespread in the Malay world around the
16th century (Aoyama 1998: 148).

　　This article considers the characteristics of the Ramayana stories in the comic

works of R. A. Kosasih (1919–2012), which were published from the 1950s and were popular from the 1960s through the 1980s in Indonesia. In his comic works, or *komik wayang*, Kosasih, writing in Indonesian, provided many explanations or narrations in addition to dialogue. Examination of the various Ramayana texts reveals Kosasih's modifications of older ones and original creations in his unique version. From the 1960s through the 1980s, Kosasih's work was an important medium in Indonesia, especially in Java and Bali, because people could not commonly access animation via television or computer. Further, Kosasih presented readers with the full story of the Ramayana, avoiding conventional regional viewpoints, such as the Javanese, Sundanese or Balinese (Sears 1996: 276).

I will analyze the characteristics of Kosasih's Ramayana: the inspiration for his works; the circumstances of their production; their influence on other artists; and his sources, modifications, and new creations. Next, I discuss the contents, that is, certain modifications; morality; love between characters; the superheroine and deviations from usual gender imagery; and the exclusion of regional versions. Finally, I will consider Kosasih's particular comic medium.

2　Overview of Kosasih's comic works

Kosasih's first comic work of epic poems, published around 1954, was derived from one of the episodes of the Mahabarata in a puppet theater or *wayang* performance, and the characters were shown wearing the costumes of the West Javanese dance drama, *wayang orang*[3]. As a result, his comic style came to be called *komik wayang*.

Some of Kosasih's existing works are based on specific episodes from *wayang* performances. However, many of his other works are mainly based upon the full plots of the Ramayana and the Mahabarata. Usually, a single performance of *wayang* is based on a particular episode, or *lakon*, so the whole story is told to the audience in random order. Kosasih's unique accomplishment is his chronological reconstruction of the complete plots of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, including both modifications and new creations, as well as some adaptations of *wayang* episodes. Sears (1996: 277–278) also pointed out that Kosasih made a decision to separate the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories from the specific stories of *wayang* performance that he called *wayang purwa*. These specific stories are about the Hindu gods, and in *wayang* they are performed in *ruwatan*, that is, a ritual to protect people against evil fortune[4].

Kosasih's main works are serialized versions of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Baratayuda*. Table 1 shows a list of serial works published by Erlina, such as *Ramayana*, *The birth of Rama and Sinta*, *Harjuna Sasrabahu*, *Mahabarata*, *Baratayuda*, *The death of Pandawa*, *Pariksit* etc. The descriptions in this article adopt Kosasih's naming of titles and characters as given in Table 1.

Although there are some works based on episodes from the Mahabarata in *wayang* performances, e.g., *Arjuna's feast*, *Mintaraga*, and *Dewa Ruci*, the serial works that depict the entire plots of epic poems form the main part of Kosasih's works.

The Javanese, Sundanese and Balinese people knew the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mainly through episodic and random *wayang* performances. As a result, they knew only parts of the two epics, episodes involving specific characters[5]. By reading Kosasih's comic works, people became familiar with the complete plots. In addition, by presenting the poems in their entirety, and dramatizing them with *wayang* episodes, Kosasih was able to create his own attractive version of these poems.

Table 1　List of R. A. Kosasih's works[6]

Erlina, of Bandung in West Java, published 28 of Kosasih's works. The letters A, B etc, indicate one volume in a multivolume work.

 1 *Mahabarata* (*Mahabaratha*) ABC
 2 *Lanjutan Mahabarata* ABC (second series)
 3 *Pandawa Seda* AB (Pandawa's Ascent to Svarga)
 4 *Raden Parikesit* AB
 5 *Prabu Udrayama* ABC
 6 *Ramayana* ABC
 7 *Putra Rama* AB (Rama's son)
 8 *Wayang purwa* ABCD
 9 *Arjuna Sasrabahu* ABCD
10 *Raja Purwa Carita* ABCD
11 *Bomantara* ABCD
12 *Panji Semirang* ABCD
13 *Ken Arok ken Dedes* AB
14 *Candra Birawa* AB
15 *Leluhur Hastina* AB (Ancestor of Hastina)
16 *Lahirnya Rama dan Sinta* AB (The Birth of Rama and Sinta)
17 *Dasamuka* ABC
18 *Batara Kresna* ABC
19 *Hanoman* ABC
20 *Bagawad Gita*
21 *Arjuna Wiwaha* (Arjuna's feast)
22 *Kerajaan Wajo Singkang* AB (Wajo Singkang kingdom)
23 *Begawan Mintaraga* AB (an ascetic Mintaraga)
24 *Dewa Ruci*
25 *Burisrawa Merindukan Bulan* (Burisrawa's love for the moon)
26 *Bambang Surya Putra*
27 *Sitigahara* ABC
28 *Batara Wisnu*

2.1   Circumstances of production

The following details of Kosasih's life and how he created his works are based on an article in the magazine *Tempo* (Chudori 1991: 41–63), an article and critical essay in the newspaper *Kompas* (Christina 2003; Ajidarma 2000) and the author's personal interviews with Kosasih (15th March 2009, and 15th March 2012).

Kosasih was born in 1919 at Bogor in West Java Province. As a child he liked to draw pictures. He was very interested in the comic *Tarzan*, discovering it after his mother returned from shopping in the marketplace. It was printed on a piece of newspaper used for wrapping the vegetables. He was also attracted to films and puppet theatres in West Java. He saw the West Javanese *wayang golek* (rod puppet theatre) performances so often that he memorized the puppeteer's skilled movements, the main character types, and their positions on the stage. His attraction to *wayang golek* motivated Kosasih to create comic works based on the *wayang* stories[7]. He was also interested in the cut paper illustrations in the Hollandsch-Inlandsche School textbooks (HIS, or the Dutch School for Indigenous Students, a seventh-grade Dutch language elementary school). His exposure to Western realist drawing affected his works. After school education, he obtained a position in the Ministry of Agriculture at Bogor making cut paper illustrations (Chudori 1991: 41–63).

During the 1950s, Kosasih submitted his work to a comic publishing project promoted by a newspaper company in Bandung. Its acceptance provided his first opportunity to become active as a comic artist. One of his works in around 1953 was "Sri Asih", depicting a brave superheroine, a character of whom he was very fond (Christina 2003). In fact, some of his works were influenced by American comic heroes such as "Flash Gordon" or "Superman"[8]. The important point here, however, is that he created Indonesian superheroes since, during that period, many Western-influenced comics were criticized by Lekra (People's Culture Organization), which was gaining influence[9]. In his study of Indonesian comics, M. Bonneff (1998: 104) alluded to such criticism in the foreword to a *Ramayana* published in 1962 in Surakarta, Central Java: "This comic work was produced to break down the negative affect on a youth devoted to Western culture". Unfortunately, the author of this *Ramayana* cannot be confirmed. Additionally, according to Christina (2003), Indonesian educators criticized many works that imitated foreign comics and condemned their influence as dangerous. S. G. Ajidarma (2000), an Indonesian journalist and writer, remembers Kosasih's Ramayana being published in the 1960s. G. M. Sudarta, a cartoonist born in 1945, remembers reading Kosasih's work around 1960 (personal interview on 2 Dec. 2008). Following their memories, we know that Kosasih's comics were published sometime during the 1960s under the same conditions of production as the anonymous Ramayana mentioned above.

We can also assume that Kosasih attempted to find his own way by using traditional myths or epic poems as the basis of comic works. In fact, his early work "Burisrawa Merindukan Bulan", was based on an episode from the Mahabharata.

Although the publisher disapproved and had negative expectations for this work, readers welcomed the comic based on a *wayang* story. This event inaugurated the production of Kosasih's *komik wayang*. Coincidentally, in the library at Bogor, Kosasih discovered an Indonesian version of the Bhagavad Gita (from Balai Pustaka). Afterwards, as the basis of his works, Kosasih adapted the Indonesian versions of the Indian epic poems. In these circumstances, he produced comics depicting the entire Mahabharata and Ramayana, and these are still considered to be his definitive works (Chudori 1991: 41–63).

In the 1950s and 1960s, Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, railed against Western-style dancing and rock music and promoted "*kepribadian nasional*", or national characteristics (Lindsay 2011: 179). National identity was promoted by excluding Western elements and exploring Indonesian ones. Kosasih's way of doing this was to adopt traditional epic poems and the Indonesian language. We can say that Kosasih's creative work was one of the pioneering attempts in the formation of Indonesian national identity at that time[10].

2.2　Influence on others

Since the 1950s, Kosasih's comic works have been widely known as a visual medium with Indonesian texts, and these texts have had much influence. Indeed, many artists and intellectuals around the age of sixty or older learned the story of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata through Kosasih's comic works. They include cartoonist G. M. Sudarta (1945–), writer Umar Kayam (1932–2002), and choreographer Sardono Walyo Kusumo (1945–). All of them refer to the great impact of Kosasih's comic works on their creative activities. In addition, Marsilam Simandjuntak (1943–), an activist in the democratic movement during the Suharto era, stated that Kosasih's comics were considered educational reading at home. Although he recognized that Kosasih's style of drawing was simple in comparison to that of other authors, for example, Ardisoma, Simandjuntak pointed out that Kosasih's works are unique because they narrate the entire Mahabharata and Ramayana (Chudori 1991: 44). As Simandjuntak observed, Kosasih established a popular medium for reading the entire epic poems, that is, through comics. Furthermore, Kosasih's comics are often called *cergam* (or picture books), and as this name indicates, the audience reads many explanatory narrations as well as dialogues. Indeed, not only the pictures but also the Indonesian texts provide much information, together with Kosasih's unique perspective on the stories.

2.3　Sources and their modifications

Overall, the construction of the stories in Kosasih's comics resembles the Indian versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and not the regional ones, such as those from Central or West Java (Chidori 1991: 46, Rosidi 2000: 360, Sears 1996: 274). On the other hand, the detailed contents of his comics are original.

According to the Sundanese intellectual Ajip Rosidi (2000: 360), Kosasih used Sundanese versions of the *Mahabharata* by R. Memed Sastrahadiprawira and of the *Batara Rama* by R. A. A. Martanagara as the basis of his works. On the other hand, quoting Kosasih himself, Chudori (1991: 46) indicates that he used the Indonesian version of the *Bhagavad Gita* published by Balai Pustaka. Unfortunately, details of the sources have been lost because Kosasih could not remember his first reference book (interview on 15th March 2009). We can presume that he used some Indonesian versions of the Ramayana for his work[11]. At any rate, the version of the Ramayana in Kosasih's comic works is neither the original Indian, nor any of those in the translations or in the *wayang* stories, but his original version based on all of them.

After Maranatha (Erlina) published his comics, Kosasih tried to revise his works in accordance with his publisher's wishes. The main factor in this situation was the need for actual size drawings because the publisher, in order to keep expenses down, did not use reduced-size printing (Chudori 1991: 62–63). Ajidarma (2000) criticized the quality of Kosasih's works from the 1970s because of some deterioration in the tracing of the 1960s version, for instance, a decline of detail in the drawing of the characters and the needless insertion of sound effects and onomatopoeic words.

I do not know whether story contents changed in this revision or not, but multiple versions from the 1960s certainly exist. The comics read by Simandjuntak or Sudarta may differ a little from the 1970s versions considered in this article. According to Erlina publishing, Kosasih's comic works were at their point of highest demand during the 1970s. In this article, I treat the 1970s versions as definitive of Kosasih's golden age and use them to consider the characteristics of his unique versions of the Ramayana[12].

Although the exact sources of Kosasih's comic works remain unknown, it is significant that he presented his original versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata without including versions or episodes from certain regions. For readers unfamiliar with the regional languages and concepts or worldviews based on these languages, the Javanese *wayang* stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are difficult to understand. For example, in the *wayang* stories, the birth of Rahwana as *raksasa* (the demon king) was caused by his parent's immoral marriage[13]. Such backgrounds to various characters sometimes do not exist in the original Indian versions and are not known by Indonesian people in general, except for those Javanese or Sundanese who know the *wayang* stories. In other words, those not fond of *wayang* performances do not appreciate these complicated episodes. Furthermore, those unfamiliar with the concepts of Javanese mysticism have difficulty sympathizing with the characters in them. Kosasih did not present an accumulation of these complicated episodes, but restructured the entire plot of the epics. Using characterizations that are the same as those in the *wayang* versions he sometimes adds additional cause- effect relationships that do not exist in those versions.

One distinct difference between Kosasih's and the *wayang* versions is the exclusion of the clown figures as servants in *wayang*. These clown figures, or *panakawan*, not only entertain the audience, providing comic relief, but also serve as the puppeteer's spokespersons, critiquing society and indicating guiding principles for people's lives. In addition, they embody a specific region's originality through expressions rooted in that region's thinking or worldview. Because of their special quality, Kosasih did not include them in his comic works, except in part. According to Chudori's article, Kosasih commented, "*Panakawan*, or clown figures, are characters added by Javanese court poets or *pujanga*. I have agreed with the publisher to follow the Ramayana and the Mahabharata of Balai Pustaka, in the original version of which clown figures do not appear" (Chudori 1991: 46)[14]. By excluding the characteristic clown figures from *wayang*, and focusing on the entire plot of the epic, Kosasih's comic works evolved seriously and holistically[15].

3　Contents of Kosasih's comic works

This section elucidates the composition and contents of Kosasih's Ramayana, which was published by Erlina in Bandung, probably in 1975[16]. This Ramayana consists of 3 volumes (A, B, and C) and is divided into 10 chapters as follows.

(1) Abduction of the flower of Mantili (princess Sinta) (*Memperebutkan bunga Mantili.*)
(2) Misfortune at the Dandaka forest (*Bencana dalam rimba Dandaka*)
(3) Hanuman leaves as an envoy (*Hanuman duta*)
(4) Hanuman burns the Alengka (*Hanuman membakar Alengka*)
(5) Reclaiming the Bandalayu Strait (*Menambak selat Bandalayu*)
(6) Bloodshed at Alengka (*Banjir darah di Alengka*)
(7) The death of Sarpakanaka and Prahasta (*Ajalnya Sarpakanaka dan Prahasta*)
(8) Tugangga as the son of Hanuman (*Tugangga Hanuman putra*)
(9) Coldhearted Revenge (*Pembalasan yang mengerikan*)
(10) The end of the wicked king (*Ankaramurka*)

Kosasih's version of the Ramayana begins with the contest over the princess Sinta and ends with the burial alive of the demon king Rahwana. As already mentioned above, this composition conforms to the central part of Valmiki's Indian version of the Ramayana. On the other hand, Kosasih includes many unique episodes in his version.

3.1　Modifications and creations of stories in the Ramayana

In this section I describe specific story elements, especially characteristic elements of modification and creation by Kosasih. First, the entire adoption of a

wayang story occurs in Kosasih's Ramayana, Chapter 2, the famous episode of the monkey brothers Sugriwa and Subali (Foley 1979: 271–276, Sunardi 1979: 74–98)[17]. Other examples of partial adaptations from the *wayang* repertoire are the battle between Tugangga and Hanuman and the acknowledgement by the father of the son in Chapter 8, and Rahwana's burial alive as the result of the battle with Rama in Chapter 10.

A distinct modification by Kosasih of a *wayang* performance is Hanuman's birth, which in the *wayang* results from Anjani's swallowing the semen of the highest god in the heavens *kayangan (Kayangan)* (Sunardi 1979: 79–81). However, in Kosasih's comic work, Hanuman's birth results from Anjani's swallowing the *assam* leaf given to her by the highest god Hyang Jagadnata after he witnesses her ascetic practices (Kosasih 1975: 165)[18].

Sears (1996: 276–277) regards the episode of Wibisana, Rahwana's younger brother, as a distinctive modification by Kosasih. In Valmiki's version, Wibisana advises his elder brother Rahwana to release Sinta. Rahwana becomes angry and kicks Wibisana in the head, so Wibisana shifts his loyalty to Rama. But according to Javanese thought, however evil Rahwana may be, betraying him shows disloyalty to an elder. Conversely, Rahwana's other younger brother Kumbakarna renders devoted service to his elder brother until his death while fighting against Rama's army. Javanese people favored Kumbakarna, while severely criticizing Wibisana. Kosasih revised this episode as a way of obtaining many readers' acceptance. In his version of Chapter 4, Rahwana kills his younger brother Wibisana after he advises Rahwana to release Sinta. Hanuman finds Wibisana's body and delivers it to Rama's camp. Following Rama's orders, Hanuman searches for the medicinal herb *ratamaosandi* and pulls it out of a mountain. Wibisana is then brought back to life by the *ratamaosandi*. (Kosasih 1975: 207–211). Kosasih's interpretation is that Wibisana does not change sides on his own account, but must do so because of being revived at Rama's camp. After considering the social values of the Indonesian people, Sears (1996: 277–278) pointed out this modification as an interesting example.

Episodes created by Kosasih include, for instance, the following: in Chapter 1, Rama's battle against a gigantic crow and his meeting with the black monkey Sambaraga; in Chapter 2, Batara Kangka's instructions about the medicinal herb *ratamaosandi*; in Chapter 10, the god Wisnu (Vishnu)'s separation from Rama's body, Wisnu's consultation with the ascetic Walikilia, and Wibisana's permission for the marriage of his daughter Trijata to Hanuman.

The point here is that Kosasih did not create episodes exactly the same as in Valmiki's version, nor in the popular repertoire of *wayang* performances. Kosasih's version contains elements of both. Elements of the classical Ramayana may be due to the influence of written texts such as *Batara Rama* in the Sundanese language and the Indonesian translations. His version may contain elements of *wayang* episodes due to the *wayang golek* performances from which he remembered the onstage posi-

tion of each character. He also reported that he was fond of listening to various kinds of *wayang* performance broadcast by Radio Republik Indonesia's (RRI) (personal interview on March 15, 2012).

Marcel Bonneff (1998: 106–107) indicated that many comic creators have been influenced by *wayang* performances, sometimes even receiving advice or instructions from puppeteers, or *dalang*, on making up their own stories. Kosasih's Mahabharata (21, 23, 24, in Table 1) contains episodes almost the same as those in certain *wayang* performances[19], but some are drastically modified, creating new versions, probably to achieve consistency in the storyline and add elements of drama. Also, *wayang* performances often put forward plots so complicated that it is difficult to comprehend the logic of their unfolding. Significantly, *wayang* performances are based on episodes derived from a particular character. The stories are thus character- and not plot-driven. Each episode has a self-sufficient structure in a *wayang* performance. The relationship or continuity between episodes is of less importance. In contrast, Kosasih's comic works are based on the whole story's linear plot, having a beginning, a middle, and an end. Hence, in Kosasih's work, the plot needs to be continuous and consistent.

3.2　Illustrations of morality

Beyond adding consistency, Kosasih also illustrated morality through the dialogue and behavior of his characters, as well as through his plot and character modifications and creations. Although the characters in *wayang* performances are divided into good and evil, their characterizations are not morally didactic because the good characters have weaknesses, and the evil ones have particular reasons for their crimes or unavoidable fates. For instance, Rahwana is fated to be the evil demon, and he kidnaps Sinta because he has always tried to acquire the soul of the goddess Widowati. This goddess is sometimes considered to be the goddess of good omen Lakshmi or the Javanese goddess of rice Dewi Sri. On the other hand, Kosasih's comic works contain rather typical didactic moralism, as for instance in the simple contrast between the good Rama and the evil Rahwana. Rahwana kidnaps Sinta not because she is the incarnation of Widowat, but because he is a greedy character.

Another prime example is Rama's speech and behavior when he offers to begin wandering the forest. Rama decides to go into the forest to prevent his father King Dasarata from breaking a promise. Through Rama's speech and behavior in this scene, readers perceive him to be the paragon of a *satria* or warrior. He offers a defense against his father's mistaken path in breaking a promise as a *satria* and his guilt before the gods. As a result, King Dasarata offers his sincere apology to his son and praises Rama's nobility (Kosasih 1975: 76).

Kosasih showed consideration for child readers by describing sexual scenes indirectly (Chudori 1991: 47). In chapter 4, while flying Trijata home, Hanuman drops semen into the sea because he fails to control his sexual desire. This semen

later causes the birth of his son Tugangga. Kosasih described this scene indirectly with supplementary narration (Kosasih 1975: 243).

He also gave attention to how Hindu gods were characterized. In *wayang* performances, the motif of gods dropping semen occurs not only in the Ramayana but also in the "Murwakara", a special episode for the performance of *ruwatan,* the ritual to protect people against evil fortune[20]. However, Kosasih did not adopt this motif in his work and seems to have purposely avoided characterizing the Hindu gods as having sexual desires.

Indonesian journalist Chudori (1991: 46) also indicated a similar situation in Kosasih's illustrations of the Mahabharata scene in which Arjuna seduces Anggraeni. The most distinctive example of consideration for young readers is the scene of Sinta's trial by fire in Chapter 10. As understood from Valmiki's version, Rama did not welcome Sinta, who had been rescued, because of doubts about her chastity. In Valmiki's version, and in many *wayang* performances, Rama does not trust Sinta; hence, she tearfully accepts a trial by fire to prove her chastity. In Kosasih's version, however, Sinta willingly accepts trial by fire and even smiles at Rama before undergoing the trial. Another example is the scene in which Sinta explains the intent of the requirement of purification to Trijata, who is doubtful of it (Kosasih 1975: 589).

Thus, as mentioned in connection with Simandjuntak, many intellectuals required their children to read Kosasih's comic works not only to familiarize them with the whole storyline of Indian epic poems, but also to familiarize them with the characters' moral consciousness.

3.3   Hanuman and Trijata's love story

Perhaps the epitome of Kosasih's characteristic work is the close-up of Trijata as a lady's maid and the depiction of her love affair with Hanuman. Trijata is the daughter of Wibisana, the younger brother of Rahwana, so she is Rahwana's niece. She continually encourages Sinta and takes care of her. Having a strong moral sense, Wibisana, Trijata's father, finally shifts his loyalty to Rama and renders distinguished service.

In the *wayang kulit* story, Trijata marries the old monkey Jembawan because of Rahwana's curse. Once Rahwana attempted to trick Sinta when she didn't obey him, by cutting off the heads of two prisoners, holding them out in front of her, and pretending they were the heads of Rama and Laksmana. Sinta grieves at Rahwana's crime, but Trijata discovers the truth and encourages her. Rahwana becomes angry at Trijata's interference and curses her to the fate of marrying the old ape. As her fate, Trijata does marry Jembawan and delivers one daughter, who appears in the Mahabharata as the wife of Kresna (Krishna). In Kosasih's comic works, however, Trijata's behavior differs greatly from her behavior in the traditional *wayang*. As mentioned above, Rahwana kills his brother Wibisana, and Trijata grieves about her father's death. Hanuman promises her that he will find her father's body. After

doing so, Hanuman brings Wibisana's body to Rama's camp and, through Rama's orders, revives Wibisana with the magical herb (Kosasih 1975: 218–227). In this situation, Kosasih describes Hanuman as Trijata's father's benefactor. When Rahwana tricks Sinta with the heads of the two prisoners, Trijata not only consoles the grieving Sinta and discovers the truth of the situation but also crosses the sea on a huge turtle to confirm Rama's safety (Kosasih 1975: 229–237). Guided by Hanuman, Trijata meets her father Wibisana again, and she tells Rama of Sinta's plight. Then Hanuman flies Trijata back to her palace, holding her in his arm. At this time, Hanuman cannot contain his desire, drops his semen into the sea, and thus fathers his son Tugangga. At the end of this story, when Rama tests Sinta's chastity, Trijata follows Sinta into the fire to save her. Hanuman flies into the fire to save Trijata, so Wibisana permits Hanuman to marry his daughter (Kosasih 1975: 591–595). In sum, the point is that Kosasih characterizes Trijata as active in a positive way.

In the *wayang* performance, Hanuman does not marry Trijata, and Tugangga is not their son, but the son of Hanuman and another woman (this woman has one more son, Bubis, with Rahwana). Trijata marries Jembawan and gives birth to a daughter who becomes an important character in the Mahabharata. In his comic, Kosasih created many scenes in which Hanuman supported Trijata, and he also created the plot in which they beget a son and finally marry. The story world of *wayang* contains much foreshadowing, often complicated and sometimes containing elements that are difficult to comprehend. Kosasih avoided these complications, paying attention to his readers——many of them children or not Javanese. His creations, in fact, contributed to the relative simplicity and comprehensibility of the story as a whole.

3.4　Kosasih's Trijata and superheroines

In the background of Kosasih's depiction of Trijata as active, deviating from the traditional gender imagery of the *wayang* character, lies the influence of Western comics. Kosasih depicted Trijata as an ideal female, behaving actively and heroically. Another Kosasih's character influenced by Western comics is "Sri Asih"(around 1954), the female equivalent of Superman. Sri Asih is an ordinary young woman, wearing normal clothing, but when crises arise, she is transformed into a superheroine wearing Javanese traditional costume and, of course, saves the day. This work resembles "Superman" in terms of character and the manner of transformation (Christina 2003). Kosasih also created "Siti Gahara", a superheroine wearing an Arab costume. It is obvious that Kosasih liked to create active female characters. But for traditional stories, such as the Ramayana, most readers were already familiar with the main characters, so it would have been rather difficult for Kosasih to modify Sinta's gender imagery. Perhaps for this reason, Kosasih modified Trijata to present a new kind of female character not present in the traditional stories.

3.5   Exclusion of regionalism

As explained above, to avoid regionalism, Kosasih excluded regional elements such as the clown figures or *panakawan*. Further, in *wayang* performances, Princess Sinta is the incarnation of the goddess Dewi Widowati, the ideal woman in Rahwana's mind, and he is always trying to acquire her soul. But in Kosasih's version, the reader is not presented with Sinta/Dewi Widowati's character in that way.

Also, Kosasih's presentation of the Hindu gods is an important element that avoids a certain kind of bias. The Javanese *wayang* that spread during the Islamic era nevertheless adopted Indian epics as their main sources; Hindu gods were described as causing confusion in this world. But Kosasih does not adopt such a negative view of the Hindu gods in his work. For example, in one *wayang* version of Hanuman's birth, Batara Guru, the highest god of the *svarga*, is Hanuman's father. Batara Guru drops his semen into a pond after seeing the naked body of the female monkey Anjani practicing asceticism there. Anjani delivers Hanuman after accidentally eating a leaf on which Batara Guru's semen has dropped. By contrast, Kosasih's Batara Guru drops not his semen but an *assam* leaf into the pond, and Anjani delivers Hanuman after eating the leaf (Kosasih 1975: 165).

Kosasih also emphasizes that the noble Rama is the incarnation of the Hindu god Wisnu (or Vishnu). In Chapter 10 of his comic, Kosasih includes an incident in which Wisnu, separated from Rama's body, receives advice from the hermit Walikilia concerning the extermination of Rahwana (Kosasih 1975: 551–555).

By not supporting the negative view of Hindu gods Kosasih was presenting them in the same way as Valmiki's Ramayana. For this reason among others, Kosasih succeeded in attracting many readers to the original Indian epic. As a representative Indonesian dancer, Sardono Walyo Kusumo suggested that Kosasih's story, based mainly on the original Indian version, could be appreciated by many people, as compared with *wayang*, which contains particular idioms that audience can sometimes not comprehend. Sardono called Kosasih's version of the story "the Indonesian epic", because of its lack of regionalism (Chudori 1991: 46). As Sardono suggests, Kosasih avoided regionalism by creating a version that crossed boundaries and appealed to the Indonesian populace in general. Indeed, Kosasih's modifications and creations are regarded as a "standardization" of a Ramayana, with elements of *wayang* episodes added which had previously only been enjoyed by Javanese or Sundanese people.

4   Characteristic points of the comic medium

Although I have mainly focused on the stories in Kosasih's comic works to this point, his illustrations are also vital. As a present day cartoonist, characteristically Indonesian, Sudarta remembered being strongly influenced by Kosasih's work (personal interview, 2nd Dec. 2008). Sudarta recalled that characters and scenes

Figure 1 Rama finding a husband for Sinta (due to being the winner in an archery competition) (Kosasih 1975: 44–45)

from *wayang* were realistically depicted in Kosasih's work, creating a novel fantasy world (Chudori 1991: 61). As Sudarta indicates, for many *wayang* audiences, the visual forms which the various characters took were shadow or rod puppets. Of course, the stylized expressions of these traditional performing arts are intrinsically open to the audience's imagination, allowing the possibility of various interpretations. On the other hand, the new comic medium showed a more concrete and realistic visual world right before the reader's eyes.

Sudarta set a high value on Kosasih's skillful methods of setting scenes and his depiction of characters with well-balanced figures. He also demonstrates that Kosasih's positioning of characters, for instance, viewed from the side or partly turned away, and his method of dividing scenes were influenced by the positions of puppets and scenery in *wayang* performances. Sudarta also observed that Kosasih's comic characters are well proportioned and realistically Asian. He asserts that these qualities were extremely significant for the Indonesian people's acceptance of Kosasih's work (personal interview, 8th July, 2008).

Two important examples are the depiction of Rama finding a husband for Sinta, and the battle scene between Hanuman and Indrajit (Rahwana's son) in the Alengka kingdom (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Kosasih's work greatly affected Indonesian society because it embodies the world of *wayang* through the comic medium. In 1950s Indonesia, people had little contact with visual media or animation, except for films[21]. The popularization of

Figure 2　Battle scene between Hanuman and Indrajit (Kosasih 1975: 496–497)

television did not take place until the latter half of the 1970s. Therefore, in the 1950s and 1960s, when Kosasih began to draw his comics, Indonesians had few opportunities to be entertained by visual media. For this reason, Kosasih's work became widespread, its popularity depending partly also on its low cost and the reader's familiarity with the story[22].

5　Conclusion

The composition of the Ramayana in Kosasih's comic works adopted the classical Ramayana, but it also contains many modern modifications. Based on the classical Ramayana, episodes in *wayang* performance, and his unique creations, Kosasih's original version impressed many. For one thing, he revealed the entire plot, thus interesting new readers; those readers familiar with *wayang* episodes, which were not presented in a chronological order, were able to understand the overall structure. In addition, the virtuous souls and ways of life illustrated by Kosasih's characters attracted many readers' sympathy and increased knowledge about the moral values of the Ramayana. These factors presenting the whole plot of the Ramayana in a linear way without regional embellishments and emphasizing the story's moral sensibility were Kosasih's important achievements.

Further, Kosasih's illustrations accurately portray Asian characters. In addition, he uses not only dialogue but also explanatory Indonesian text. This method differs

from *wayang* performances in which the texts are recited or performed. Because of the publication of this comic works, many readers, including *wayang* audience, gained information and understanding of the whole stories of Indian epic.

Although this article concerns only the Ramayana, a word here about the Mahabharata and other folk tales in Kosasih's work seems appropriate. In the case of the Mahabharata, Kosasih adopted the well-known *wayang* episodes without modification for some of his works. Thus, these episodes, originally known exclusively by Javanese or Sundanese people, contributed to the popularization of the story world of *wayang* performances. In this case, Kosasih's comic works have a close relationship with the *wayang* repertoire. He also produced works based on the legends or folktales of West Java, thus popularizing them also.

Kosasih's works greatly extended the opportunity for the Indonesian people to enjoy and learn from and about epic poems, legends, and folktales.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1)   While the Ramayana has relatively few didactic plots, the Mahabharata, another major epic poem, depicts the prolonged conflict between cousins with a massive number of tales. This epic poem has mainly been known in Javanese and Balinese *wayang* theatre.

2)   There are many different names for the Ramayana in Southeast Asia, but in Indonesia it is called "Ramayana". As for the characters' names, there are also many; here I have used those that Kosasih adopted in his works.

3)   Several genres are called *wayang* in Java and Bali: *wayang kulit, wayang golek, wayang orang/ wayang wong, wayang topeng*, and *wayang beber*. In these genres puppeteers, or dalang, are indispensable. This article deals mainly with the stories in *wayang kulit* (shadow play) and *wayang golek* (rod puppets).

4)   The stories called "*wayang purwa*" here refer to specific stories about the Hindu gods. However, people often use the term "*wayang purwa*" for the *wayang* repertoire based on the Ramayana and the Mahabarata as well (Weintraub 2004: 247). There seems to be some confusion in Kosasih's use of this term.

5)   Ajip Rosidi mentioned that people could also come to know the entire plots of these epic poems from everyday conversation. For example, Ajip used to attend *wayang* performances with his grandfather in his childhood. After the performances his grandfather often told him about the main characters. (Personal interview with Ajip Rosidi, October 14, 2002.)

6)   This list is based on that of Erlina Bandung. In addition to these works, Kosasih also created some based on West Javanese folk tales such as *Lutung Kasarung* and *Sangkurian*.

7)   Although Kosasih's comic works generally narrate the epic poem's entire plot, some are adaptations of *wayang* performances. Sears suggests that his *Batara Kresna* (1983) has similarities to the *banjaran* style of the famous Javanese puppeteer Nartosabto (1924–1985), which follows a character's life history through various accumulated episodes (Sears 1996: 275). The Indonesian cartoonist Sudarta, confirmed this. The *banjaran* style was Nartosabdo's favorite form, and Sudarta was fond of it (interview 8th July 2008). Although he did not see any *banjaran* performances, Kosasih got to know Nartosabdo's style through radio broadcasts (interview 15th March 2012). So we can be sure that Kosasih adopted not only the contents of stories but also the way of narrating them in *wayang* performances.

8)   The 27th work "Sitigahara" is also a story about a superheroine. Sudarta said that representing Sitigahara's behavior as very active was something completely new at that time (personal interview 8th July 2008). Breaking the traditional prescriptions on women's behavior resulted from the influence of Western comics.

9)   Lekra is an abbreviation of Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (People's Culture Organization). It was set up in 1950, as a branch of Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) or the Indonesian Communist Party, and it attempted to control culture in various ways.

10)   In post-independence Indonesia, the construction of a "national culture" has been considered an essential part of nation building. Although the basic concepts of "national culture" and "regional culture" had existed before, one of the main concerns in the Sukarno era was to exclude "Western" elements. At that time there were also many artistic movements which, unlike Kosasih, aimed at the promotion of regional languages and regional art forms in order to construct a "national culture".
      These artistic movements continued in the Suharto era. During his regime (1966–1998), the "national culture" was defined as a combination of the high points (*puncak-puncak*) of all the regional cultures, a mixture of the best in the nation (Hooker 1993: 4). The main concern in this era was to realize national unity through the preservation and development of the regional cultures of Indonesia.

11)   The *Ramayana* published by Balai Pustaka is the work of D.M. Sunardi (1979). It could not have influenced Kosasih's early work. Although Kosasih could not remember early influences, he did mention an Indonesian translation of the Ramayana stories, published somewhere around Semarang (personal interview with Kosasih, 15th March 2009).

12)   According to the publisher Erlina in Bandung, the company had agencies in Bandung, Solo, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Bali and Jakarta in the 1970's. In fact, they had three agencies in both Bali and Jakarta. They had direct trading relationships with customers outside Java and Bali. (personal interview with Erlina in Bandung, 17th March 2009).

13)   In *wayang*, Rahwana's birth was the result of the gods punishing his father Wisrawa and his mother Sukesi because Wisrawa had taught the secret knowledge of mysticism to Sukesi (Sears 1986)

14)   The names of *panakawan* vary from region to region. In Central Java, the names of the four *panakawan* are Semar, Petruk, Gareng and Bagong. They are the servants of the generals, or *satriya,* on the side of good. In West Java, Bagong is called Cepot. In Bali, the names are Tualen, Welda, Delem and Sangut, the former two being servants on the side of good, the latter two on the side of evil.

15)   Kosasih created some comic works about *panakawan*. According to Sudarta, "Cepot and Udel" has stories of West Javanese *panakawan* (personal interview with Sudarta 8th July 2008).

16)   The publication date of this comic is supposed to be 1975, and in fact, I did see the date August 1, 1975 for permission for publication in this work. My copies may be reprints, but I could not find a reprint date.

17)   The story of Sugriwa and Subali can be traced to the episode of "Cupu Manik Astagina" in the *wayang*. Gautama, the ascetic, cursed his wife Indradi after her infidelity with Surya became known to him, and in anger he transformed her into a stone statue. As a result of Gautama's throwing away Indradi's jewel case acquired from Surya, two lakes were formed when it crashed to the ground, breaking into two pieces. Sugriwa and Subali entered the lakes and were transformed into monkeys. Their elder sister, Anjani, washed her face in the lake, so her face and hands were changed into those of a monkey. In the episode titled "Sugriwa Subali", Sugriwa and Subali were in conflict over the territory of the Sukenda mountains and their wives (Foley 1979: 74–98).

18)   However, in some *wayang* stories, Hanuman is Rama's son, not Batara Guru's.

19)　We can also see examples of altering episodes in the Mahabharata. Kosasih depicted Drupati as the wife of Yudistira, the eldest of the Pandawa brothers. In the Indian version Drupati is the wife to all the brothers. About this, Kosasih stated, "it is impossible [that] Drupati had five husbands."(Chudori 1991: 46).

20)　In the episode "Murwakala", *komo salah* or the sperm mistakenly dropped by the God, Batara Guru, gives rise to the Demon, or *raksasa,* Batara Kala. Performances of Murwakala would be seen only at *ruwatan*, the ritual to protect people against evil fortune. We cannot see performances of this particular episode on the usual occasions for *wayang* performances, such as weddings, circumcisions, or the ritual of rice cultivation.

21)　Film Screenings have taken place in Indonesia since the beginning of the 20th century. The first film produced in Indonesia was in 1926, but the true dawn of Indonesian films took place in the 1950's (Heider 1991: 15–18). At the time Kosasih began to create his comic works, the Indonesian people could already access the medium of films. Kosasih himself was fond of them, so they might have affected his work. Indonesian National Television (TVRI) was founded in 1962. At first, people could only see television broadcasts in a limited area, such as the capital city of Jakarta. The broadcasting satellite PALAPA was launched in 1976, and television receivers have spread rapidly since the latter half of the 1970's (Sen and Hill 2007:110).

22)　According to Sudarta , in 1956, when he was in the upper grades of elementary school, Kosasih's comics cost about 30 seng. At that time, Sudarta could buy a light meal, such as rice with vegetable dishes and ice candy (*nasi*, *gado-gado*, and *es lilin*) for 10 seng. So as a boy, Sudarta could not buy comics with his pocket money, and he asked his parents to buy them (personal interview with Sudarta in December 2008).

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