

**Formula and Ideology in Cloak-and-Dagger Stories:
Findings on Indonesian Cloak-and-dagger stories *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* (Ghost of
Bara Kaliatus)” by Bastian Tito and *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua* (The Revenge of
Nine Old Devils) by Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho**

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Abstrak

Artikel ini adalah paparan atas temuan mengenai formula dan ideologi di dalam cerita silat Indonesia (*Indonesian cloak-and-dagger stories*) atas telaah formula dan ideology terhadap dua karya cerita silat berjudul *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* karya Bastian Tito dan *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua* karya Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho. Telaah formula dilakukan atas adanya pandangan bahwa cerita silat merupakan salah satu *genre* sastra populer yang salah satu karakteristiknya adalah alur cerita yang formulaik. Sedangkan telaah ideologi dilakukan berdasarkan anggapan bahwa selalu ada ideologi yang tertanam di setiap karya sastra. Hasil telaah mengarah pada kesimpulan bahwa formula di dalam cerita silat seragam, sebagaimana ditunjukkan pada kesamaan formula pada *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* dan *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*. Sedangkan dalam hal ideologi, hasilnya bervariasi, sebagaimana ditunjukkan pada adanya terdapat perbedaan yang kontras antara cerita di dalam *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* dan *Dendam Iblis Tua*, dalam hal relasi laki-laki dan perempuan.

Kata Kunci: *Cerita Silat, Formula, Ideologi*

INTRODUCTION

Some of Famous Indonesian Cloak-and-dagger Stories Writers

Bastian Tito was a very popular Indonesian cloak-and-dagger-story writer. His most phenomenal masterpiece is the series of *Wiro Sableng*, which consist of 185 episodes¹. In each of the episodes, Tito always presents a new problem, new mystery, and sometimes even some new character(s), which is always unveiled as well as solved at the end through the fights between the protagonist(s) and (new) antagonists yet having relations to some character(s) in the previous edition(s).

Meanwhile, Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho, an Indonesian writer of Chinese decent, was another writer of the same genre. As was Tito, he was very popular especially among Indonesian as well as international cloak-and-dagger readers in his era.

According to Mira Sidharta in Archipel regarding to his creative processes in writing, “Kho undertakes research on the geography and history of the venue of

¹ <http://hanaoki.wordpress.com/novel-2/novel-silat/bastian-tito/wiro-sableng-pdf/>

the action” (1994: 162). Hence, it is highly possible that it is related to how he present the story in each of the works of his.

Cloak-and-dagger Stories or *cerita silat* or *cersil* is considered a literary genre and categorized as a variant of popular literature. As we all know, popular literature is distinguished from ‘serious’ literature through some aspects, including aesthetics in the context of linguistics. Popular literature neglects the use of ‘beautiful’, highly literary, as well as poetic language, as what we usually find in most serious literary works.

Other than the literary aesthetics, a popular literary work is also distinguished through its formula, which can only be found in popular literary works.

Therefore, popular literary works are often also called formulaic literary works having general or common and uniform patterns that only can be extended by variations without departing from the formulas. However, regardless such elementary differences, we cannot simply deny that in the context of theme and ideology, there are always fundamental and serious matters within the stories of such a genre that can be understood by critical readers.

THE BASIC FORMULA OF CLOAK-AND-DAGGER STORIES

Cloak-and-dagger stories is an autonomous genre. Despite having some similarities with mystery, adventure, and detective stories, its formula is has a specific and peculiar formula that distinguishes it from any other genre. Every work of this genre has formulaic topics, i.e. physical contacts and disputes between characters who represent good deeds, martial artists, or knights, and those who represent evilness.

Myra Sidharta in her research published in Archipel, Edition 48², makes a statement about Cloak-and-dagger stories as follow:

Cloak-and-dagger stories or cerita silat, as they called in Indonesian, began to develop in china at the end of the Qing dynasty, when new trends in literature developed. These had their roots in earlier novels, but with a completely different spirit. They praise heroic deeds and the fight against injustice. (Sidharta, 1994: 160).

She states that the main topic of Cloak-and-dagger stories in “*heroic deeds*” and “*the fight against injustice*”, which are the formulaic main elements of Cloak-and-dagger Stories.

The Same Formula in *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* and *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*

Generally, the main elements of Cloak-and-dagger stories genre are heroic deed dan fight against injustice (Sidharta, 1994). Meanwhile, in this research on *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* and *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, it is found the main topics of both works are relevant to such a formulation.

In both of the works, the elements of fight against injustice and heroic

² Dalam Archipel. Volume 48, 1994. pp. 157-176.

deeds are found in the stories entirely. In detail, the findings can be explained in the table below:

<i>In Hantu Bara Kaliatus</i>	<i>In Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Luhcinta and Laehijau's heroic rescue of Luhsantini from Latandai murder trial - Luhkimkim's release from being knotted by Hantu Muka Dua - A fight between Wiro Sableng, helped by his 2 friends, and Lakasipo - A punishment given by Peri Bunda to Latandai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hek-Liong-Li Lie Kim Cu's heroic action when saving himself as well as Pek-Liong Eng Tan Cin Hay, who's already got fainted after falling into a gorge. - The royal soldiers' heroic action in saving Cian-ciang-kun Cian Hui and his wife, Cu Sui In - The Kams brothers' heroic action (Kam Sun Ting & Kam Cian Li) - Pertarungan Pek-Liong, Liong-Li, and the friends' fight against Thai-san Ngo-kwi and Kiu Lomo

Heroic Deeds & Fight against Injustice in *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* and in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*

The elements found in either story become the main factor to confirm that they belong to the genre of *Cloak-and-dagger stories*.

The Same Formula of Plot both in *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* and *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*

In both of the stories, it is also found that the plot is formulaic. Both of the stories share the same main problem, which is *good versus evil*. In this analysis, the formulaic plot shows that at the end of the story, the good becomes the winner and the evil becomes the loser. Using the plot structure model of exposition-rising action-climax-falling action-resolution, the plot is explained as follows:

1. Exposition: The Emergence of Evil Characters

The plots of both of the stories begin with evilness, shown evil characters. In *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, the evilness is started Hantu Santet Laknat who agitates Latandai in order to make him become a new evil character. His agitation is done by telling Latandai that his wife, Luhsantini, had committed an adultery with another man just before their marriage, and that the baby is not his. Instead, it is a fruit of the adultery she and her lover committed. Hantu Santet Laknat predictably makes Latandai get angry and rush to murder her.

Meanwhile, in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, the evilness begins with the appearance of the members of Kiu Lomo and those of Thai-san Ngo-kwi who want to take revenge for the death of Siau-w-bin Ciu-Kwi, one of the members of Kiu Lomo, who was murdered by Pek-Liong-Eng and Hek-Liong-Li.

2. Rising Action: Threats to the good people and resistances to them

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from the advocates and defenders of the truth

In *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, this stage is marked by Latandai's manhunt for Luhsantini dan Lasingar, and also by his effort to murder Lakasipo. It is, then, followed with a fight between Lakasipo, helped by Wiro and the friends, and Latandai. However, Lakasipo and the friends run away for realizing not yet prepared and strong enough to fight against Latandai.

Meanwhile, in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, threats to the good people are manifested in form of terror and abduction to the beloved best friends of Pek Liong-Eng Tan Cin Hay and Hek-Liong-Li Lie Kim Cu, making them have no choice but to face and fight against the rebellious members of Kiu Lomo and Thai-san Ngo-kwi.

3. Climax: Fights between the Evils characters and the Advocates and Defenders of the truth: The good gets stronger, the evil gets weaker.

In *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, Latandai finds that Luhsantini in her hiding place, deceives her, and tries to kill her. Meanwhile, in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, there is a regress at the side of Pek-Liong-Eng Tan Cin Hay and Hek-Liong-Li Lie Kim Cu exactly when the hostages are released that either Pek-Liong-Eng Tan Cin Hay or Hek-Liong-Li Lie Kim Cu only has one guard now.

In the process, Pek-Liong-Eng Tan Cin hay gets fainted and thus Hek-Liong-Li Lie Kim Cu tries to rescue him by running away. Unluckily, she slips and falls with him into a gorge. Consequently, the friends and guards of them become hostages for the second time.

4. Falling Action: The Good's Victory

In *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, Lakasipo, Wiro Sableng, Setan Ngompol, and Naga Kuning find Latandai who is about to murder Luhsantini. A fight with the gloves off against each other happens. Then, comes Peri Bunda, the leader of fairies in the sky that intervene. Meanwhile, in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, Hek-Liong-Li dramatically saves herself from death.

5. Resolution: The Evil's Defeat

In both of the works, the end of the story has the same formula, which is the victory of the good and the defeat of the evil. In *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, it can be seen in the part of the story where Peri Bunda punishes Latandai by inserting some ember into Latandai's stomach for the evilness he has done as well as his stubbornness.

Meanwhile, in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, the members of Kiu Lomo and Thai-san Ngo-Kwi were all killed in the battle and their subordinates are brought to justice. On the other hand, the good people, the advocates and defenders of the truth get better fortunes.

It is the end of the story of *Pendekar Naga Putih* (White Dragon Hero) and *Nona Naga Hitam* (Miss Black Dragon). They sell their old houses, marry each other, and become man and wife, who:

“...pindah tinggal di lereng sebuah bukit yang indah dan sunyi, dekat telaga barat, hidup dalam keadaan tenteram dan penuh damai karena

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mereka tidak lagi mau mencampuri urusan dunia kangouw yang penuh dengan kekerasan dan permusuhan.”

“...move to some beautiful and quite slope, near the west lake. They live a peaceful life because they don't want to have a hand at all in the problems in the *kangouw* world, which is full of violence and hostility.”

(Kho, 2003, jilid 9: 38-39)

The formula of both of the cloak-and-dagger stories is uniform. In this research, it is found that the plot of either *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* or *Dendam Sembilan* represents the general plot standard of cloak-and-dagger stories.

The use of formula for both of the works is based on the plot type, as follow:

The emergence of evil characters → Threats to the good people and resistances to them from the advocates and defenders of the truth → Fights between the Evils characters and the Advocates and Defenders of the truth: The good gets stronger, the evil gets weaker. → The Good's Victory → The Evil's Defeat

IDEOLOGY

Hantu Bara Kaliatus by Bastian Tito and *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua* by Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho. Both of the ideologies are explained further as follows:

1. Exploiting the sensuality of female body: A Support for Patriarchic Ideology in *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*

In *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, female body becomes the most exploited object. Such an exploitation, though not physical, it still sees the female body as an object. This body objectification emphasizes the position of this work as within the patriarchic discourse circle.

In this novella, there are many parts of story that depict female body exploitations wrapped in the use of vulgar and unaesthetic expressions.

“Perempuan raksasa itu....” bisik Naga Kuning. “Wajahnya cantik, pakaiannya sangat tipis. Aku dapat melihat sekujur auratnya! Lihat, tubuhnya putih bagus. Dadanya sebesar batu raksasa di sungai. Perutnya begitu mulus... ah aku bisa bersembunyi dalam pusarnya! Hik...hik...hik...!”

Lakasipo ulurkan dua tangannya memeluk tubuh Luhrinjani. “Cium wajahku Lakasipo, belai tubuhku....” Bisik Luhrinjani lalu pakaian sutera tipisnya lepas jatuh ke tanah. (Tito, 1970: 78-79)

“That ogress...” whispered Naga Kuning. “Her face is beautiful. Her dress is so thin. I could see her whole body! Look, her body is white

and fine. Her breasts are as big as gigantic rocks in the river. Her belly is flawless... ah, I can hide within her navel! Hik...Hik...Hik...!"

Lakasipo stretched his arms to hug Luhrijani's body. "Kiss my face, Lakasipo. Caress my body...." Whispered Luhrijani just before her dress fell to the ground.

The quotation describes an erotic scene of Lakasipo and the spirit of her late wife, Luhrijani, witnessed by *Wiro Sableng*, Setan Ngompol, and Naga Kuning.

The excerpt above shows how the author is considerably rude and vulgar in describing the story:

"*Lihat dada perempuan itu! Walah mak! Besar amat!*" kata Setan Ngompol dengan mata melotot. "*Bisa mati enak aku kalau sampai ketiban!*" ujar Naga Kuning yang juga memandang dengan mata mendelik. (Tito, 1970: 37-39).

"Look at her boobs. Oh my God! Really huge!" said Setan Ngompol while his eyes are open wide. "They even could kill me if striking me" said Naga Kuning while with his eyes are also open wide. (Tito, 1970: 37-39).

The objectification of the female body is also found in the excerpt below:

"*Anaknya putih. Rambutnya dikuncir kepirang-pirangan. Dia memiliki sepasang kaki yang bagus. Pahanya putih sekali. Pakaiannya agak tersingkap di bagian dada. Aku benar-benar tidak bisa melupakannya! Aku ingin sekali bertemu lagi dengan dia. Ah....*" (Tito, 1970: 37-39).

"Her daughter is fair-skinned. The hair, which is rather blond, is knotted in pigtail. She has a pair of nice shoes. Her thighs are so fair. Her Pahanya putih sekali. Her dress is opened right in area of the breasts, not deliberately. I really cannot forget her. Ah...." (Tito, 1970: 37-39).

The excerpts above are different parts of story but in the same discourse, which is objectifications of the female body. Words "*dada* (breasts), "*paha* (thighs)", "*pinggul* (hip)", "*ketiak* (armpits)" as well as a sentence "Her body, which is flawless white, wrapped in a dress made of barks finished with a purple soot." are symbolic expressions of female body stripping as well as efforts to possess the female body through the patriarchic discourse.

2. The Idea of an Ideal Androgynous Society: Deconstructing a Patriarchic Ideology in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua* by Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho

While Bastian Tito's *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* is full of patriarchic ideology for it intensively depicts objectifications of the female body. On the contrary, *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua* depicts the contrary. To read *Dendam*

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Sembilan Iblis Tua is to read a very important story in terms of how an ideal male-female relation is constructed.

In this story, it is found that there is a kind of image of an ideal androgynous society confronted with a negative image of patriarchic ideology. The reflection of androgyny is shown in the characterizations of the protagonists, such as the main characters Pek-Liong-Eng Tan Cin Hay and Hek-Liong-Li Lie Kim Cu, supporting characters Cian-Ciang-Kun Liok San, Kam brothers (Kam Sun Ting and Kam Cian Li), and Song Tek Min and his wife, Su Hong Ing.

However, the clearest depiction is shown in the relation between Song Tek Hin and his wife, Su Hong, as follows:

Suami isteri Song Tek Hin dan Su Hong Ing tinggal di dusun Kian-co di luar kota Cin-an. Mereka telah lima tahun menikah dan hidup rukun, mempunyai seorang anak laki-laki yang sudah berusia tiga tahun lebih bernama Song Cu. Song Tek Hin yang pandai ilmu sastera dan silat membuka perguruan bun (sastera) dan bu (silat) dimana banyak anak muda belajar dengan pembayaran sekadarnya. Mereka mempunyai sawah ladang dan kehidupan mereka lumayan walau tidak kaya. Dan kedua suami istri ini dihormati orang, karena keduanya merupakan orang-orang yang berwatak lembut dan ramah, juga bukan hanya Song Tek Hin saja yang pandai ilmu silat, bahkan istrinya Su Hong Ing, tidak kalah oleh suaminya. Wanita ini adalah murid Butong-Pai dan memiliki ilmu silat yang cukup lihai. (Kho, 2003, jilid 3: 62-63)

Song Tek Hin and his wife, Su Hong Ing, lived in Kian-co village, outside Cin-an town. They'd got married for five years and lived peacefully, had an three-year-old son, named Song Cu. Song Tek Hin, good at literature and martial arts, opened a school of *bun* (literature) and *bu* (martial arts) where a lot of youngsters were studying by paying modestly. They had some rice field and their life was good enough, though not wealthy. And, both of them got high respects in the community due to their naturally meek and friendly. And, not only Song Tek Hin was very good at martial arts but also was Sung Hong Ing. She was not less skillful in it than her husband. This woman was the disciple of Butong-Pai and had very good skills of martial arts. (Kho, 2003, volume 3: 62-63)

Pada suatu senja yang cerah dan tenang. Rumah Song Tek Hin sudah sepi karena suami isteri itu mengajar para murid dalam ilmu silat dan baca tulis mulai pagi sampai lewat tengahari. Di waktu sore dan malamnya mereka berdua tidak mau sibuk mengajar, melainkan mengurus hasil sawah ladang dan beristirahat. Senja hari itu mereka mengaso di ruangan belakang sambil bermain-main dengan Song Cu, anak tunggal mereka...(Kho, 2003, jilid 3: 63-64)

In a clear and quiet twilight, Song Tek Hin's house had been deserted. The couple was teaching and training the disciples with martial arts and reading and writing, started in the morning and would finish after noon. In the afternoon and evening, they refused to teach and train. Instead, they chose to take care of the harvest and then took a rest. In that dusk, they took a rest in the back room while playing with Song Cu, their one and only child...(Kho, 2003, jilid 3: 63-64)

The excerpt is the depiction of a family consisting of androgynous people. The personality of an androgyny, as quoted from Tong that:

In order to liberate women and men from the culturally constructed cages of masculinity and femininity, many liberal feminists besides Betty Friedan advocate the formation of androgynous personalities. (2009: 36)

This theory is relevant to the relation between Su Hong Ing and Song Tek Hin and husband/wife spouse. They who help each other make no gender-based dichotomy of roles in their family life. Besides, the masculinity and femininity features in the personalities of both characters are not separated so clear. Tong in *Feminist Thought* (2009: 36) states that,

...gender-role stereotyping will limit the individual's possibilities for development as a unique self.

The neglect of gender dichotomy makes Su Hong Ing get trapped in merely feminine features as frequently constructed in most patriarchic texts. Meanwhile, the description of such man-and-wife characterizations deconstructs an opinion that,

“...woman who displays characteristics her social group regards as masculine will be viewed as less than a real woman; the man who shows so-called feminine traits will be considered less than a real man (Tong, 2009: 36).

Su Hong Ing is described as a character who has a high skill of martial arts. She shares jobs of teaching reading and writing and training martial arts with her husband, the jobs that they do interspersed with farming and childrearing. This is a unique picture of how potential positive features of masculinity and femininity are mixed with each other and applied in the life of a family, as depicted in the story. The role of Su Hong Ing as a housewife doesn't bring down her value as a woman. As a result, the family life is harmonious.

It is found that *Hantu Bara Kaliatus* represents a kind of patriarchic text since the author frequently uses a female body as an object of exploitation. On the contrary, Kho Ping Ho in *Dendam Sembilan Iblis* offers a very contrast image to such a Tito's work. Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho creates a text that tries to deconstruct a patriarchic hegemony by representing a type of androgyny society manifested in the features of the protagonists.

As a whole, the 103rd edition of Cloak-and-dagger stories of *Wiro Sableng*,

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Hantu Bara Kaliatus, written by Bastian Tito and *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*, written by Asmaraman Sukowati Kho Ping Ho are proven very formulaic. From the plot analysis, first of all, it is shown that the plot is something commonly used by writers of popular literature. Clashes between the “good and the “evil” constructing the plot are followed by a happy ending, supposed to satisfy popular readers, especially if it is connected to the principles of pleasure and relaxation in reading literature. Hence, it is something we cannot simply deny that story was written with the aim of fulfilling the need of entertainment (*dulce* rather than *utile*).

Moreover, the sociocultural aspect plays an important role in the characters’ *stereotyping* so that there are some modified stereotypes, where either Bastian Tito or Kho Ping Ho has somewhat a different way in stereotyping some specific characters. The aspect of writer in the context of either Javanese culture or Chinese culture (Kho Ping Ho was of Chinese descent, holding joint citizenship in Indonesia and People’s Republic of China) may also play a role in vitalizing the stereotypes.

And, in terms of ideology, they are strongly related to each other in case of patriarchic culture. *Hantu Bara Kaliatus*, very patriarchic shown by his habit of exploiting the sensuality of female body, is confronted with the ideas of androgyny as conveyed by Kho Ping Ho through the cloak-and-dagger story of *Dendam Sembilan Iblis Tua*.

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