

INDONESIAN LITERATURE POSITION AS WORLD LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the position of Indonesian literature in the world. Indonesia is sometimes underestimated due to its identity as third world nation. It sometimes impacts the way foreign researchers value Indonesian's intellectual products such as literature. It is considered necessary to evaluate position of Indonesian in world literature. This research is a qualitative study since it is completed through document analysis. This study uses Damrosch's theory of world literature's characteristics in order to check and to find out whether Indonesian literature can be categorized as world literature or not. Indonesian literary works that have been used as the objects of analysis are Sangkuriang, Mahabharata, and literary works that have been written by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. At the end of this study, it is concluded that Indonesian literature fulfilled the three main characteristics of world literature and it is able to be categorized as world literature.

Keywords: Indonesia Literature, World Literature, Damrosch, Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas tentang posisi karya sastra Indonesia sebagai bagian dari karya sastra dunia. Indonesia terkadang diremehkan karena identitasnya sebagai negara dunia ketiga. Situasi ini terkadang berpengaruh pada cara pandang peneliti luar terhadap produk intelektual Indonesia seperti karya sastra. Diperlukan adanya evaluasi tentang posisi karya sastra Indonesia di dunia. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan kajian pustaka yang menerapkan analisis dokumen. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori dari Damrosch untuk memastikan apakah sastra Indonesia dapat digolongkan sebagai sastra dunia. Karya sastra Indonesia yang ditelaah dalam penelitian ini adalah Sangkuriang, Mahabharata, dan karya-karya sastra yang ditulis oleh Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Pada akhir penelitian ini, disimpulkan bahwa sastra Indonesia memenuhi tiga karakteristik utama dari sastra dunia dan dapat digolongkan sebagai sastra dunia.

Kata Kunci: Sastra Indonesia, Sastra Dunia, Damrosch, Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

INTRODUCTION

As the member of the third world nation (Sidjaja, 2014), it is undeniable that there are unpleasant comments about Indonesia, especially related to the issue of its educational system or intelligence product. In 2013, Elizabeth Pisani, a famous academic researcher, conducted a study to measure Indonesian children's intelligence and she found that most of Indonesian students only reached the lowest grade standard and comprehension of Math and Science. Six years later, Pisani reported that most of Indonesian children are still unable to use basic scientific knowledge. This fact might cause some countries to doubt Indonesian's literary product. Generally, Indonesia has been perceived as a country which is "better known for . . . volcanoes, island paradises, shadow puppets, and the world's largest population of Muslims rather than its intelligence" (Garcia, 2006, p. 184). On the other hand, actually "Indonesia's books remain largely untranslated, a secret library ringed by fire and water" (Garcia, 2006, p.184). It means that although several Indonesian literary products have been successfully translated into English and other languages, but, there are books, novels, poets, and other historical documents which have not been translated into English or other languages (Sim, 2008) despite their quality. Ironically, some of Indonesian important documents are reported missing or burnt. This condition makes Indonesian literature stays unfortunate since outside world would not be able to know about Indonesian through literature.

Some Indonesian scholars, poets, and novelists have their own charm and popularity in the world, for instance, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Although there are various aspects that can be proposed as the evidence to prove that Indonesian literature has its crucial position in world literature, there are several cases or issues to debate this idea. Therefore, further research is necessary to be conducted in order to find out Indonesian particular position in world literature.

This study aims to investigate the position of Indonesian literary work in the vision of world literature and whether Indonesia literature can be categorized as world literature by observing the characteristics of world literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

David Damrosch is one of various theorists who focuses on analyzing literary works by connecting them to the context of what should be called world literature. In brief, Damrosch

(2003) proposed that based on the context of the world, the text, and the reader, a literary world can be defined as world literature if it has these three characteristics:

1. World literature is writing that gains in translation.
2. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading.

Damrosch (2009) emphasized that literatures around the world give the readers an unprecedented variation of literary contentment and cultural experiences. Due to the quantity of uncountable amount of these variations, it is necessary to find a proper measurement to categorize a literary work as a particular work literature. Those three characteristics can be used to categorize a literary work as world literature without neglecting its national or cultural aspect because they are related, bound, and completed one another. Thus, the presence of the characteristics fit to specify a literary work.

a. World Literature is Writing that Gains in Translation

When the litterateurs comprehend world literature as writing that gains in translation, it would give some understandings to embrace the “contemporary intellectual life. Also it can help the readers and researchers to use the translations well, with a productively critical engagement” (Damrosch, 2003, p. 290). Translation helps the literary work to be known worldwide and gain recognition from readers and experts around the world.

There are critiques from experts who claimed that translations might be mistranslated or produce new word or meaning when it is translated from the original to another language. It is possible that the translation reduces the real meaning of the original literary work. However, despite of the chances of error, the translation still plays a crucial role in expanding a specific literary work from a culture or a nation to world in particular. In this context, Damrosch proposed *The Tale of Genji* as his example. *The Tale of Genji* has been translated into several languages. It has been translated by Haruo Shirane, Ivan Morris, and the latest, Royall Tyler. These three translators even gave different titles to their works. Haruo Shirane’s title is *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of The Tale of Genji*, Ivan Morris’ title is *The World of the Shining Prince*, and Royall Tyler with *Genji*. Some of these translations might contribute different aspects and some might be lacking of contextual information than specialists possess, such as Royall Tyler’s translation—but it is “an approach that shifts one’s understanding into the realm of Japanese literature” (Damrosch, 2003, p. 297). Despite the deficiency that *Genji*’s translation

may have, it is undeniable that the translations still tell people around the world about Japanese culture in the novel. Although some translations might be critiqued as a copy of original one, it still contributes to spread a particular culture or aspect from a particular literary work to the world and then recognized as world literature.

b. World Literature is an Elliptical Refraction of National Literatures

It is a widely shared belief that the national language was a privileged bearer of the national spirit. It means that national literature might have national characteristic. Damrosch then added that “works of world literature interact in a charged field defined by a fluid and multiple set of possibilities of juxtaposition and combination” (2003, p. 300). It also means that world literature may contains more than one various combination of values or cultural characteristics. As Damrosch specifically claimed that:

“Even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures. The receiving culture can use the foreign material in all sorts of ways; as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition; as a negative case of a primitive, or decadent, strand that must be avoided or rooted out at home; or, more neutrally, as an image or radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined. World literature is thus always as much about the host culture’s values and needs as it is about a work’s source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone” (p. 283).

The statement points that a literary work which is going to be classified as world literature is actually a combination of more than one different cultures. A particular literary work from a particular country might imitate a literary work which had been existed first in another country (primary source). Then, a new literary work is created by adjusting and subtracting the story based on the value or background that the country (secondary source/receiving culture) has. Therefore, in the context of world literature, every literary work is actually a refraction of national literature from a particular country (primary source) to other countries (secondary

source/receiving culture) which create the same theme or genre by adjusting the model or the literary work based on the value of each country or culture.

c. World Literature is a Mode of Reading

A literary work or literature will be categorized as world literature if it has become a mode of reading. Mode of reading is closely related to refraction of literary work. Damrosch (2003) proposed that “world literature’s attachments are multiplied by the fact that it is at once a collective and an individual phenomenon. A large and multilayered group of foreign works that circulate in a given culture. It is also experienced as a private pleasure by individual readers, in ways that may diverge dramatically from the social goals that usually underlie the defining and formal transmission of a literary heritage” (p. 298). In order to make it more distinct and simple, Damrosch specified a literary work which has a mode of reading becomes a favorite reading across time and nation. In other words, it has become a face of a particular theme or model.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a part of qualitative one conducted through library research and analyzing documents because “analyzing and examining documents is part of the first steps in conducting qualitative study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). The data are analyzed by using Damrosch’s theory of world literature characterization. This study specifically uses several Indonesian literatures as the object of analysis. They are the national folks called *Sangkuriang* and *Mahabharata* and the literary works written by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *Sangkuriang* and *Mahabharata* were chosen due to their refractions on national literature and also similarity with other literatures from different countries. Meanwhile, Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s literary works were utilized because he has become Indonesian legendary novelists and writers since many of his works have been translated into other languages. Also, most of his works have been analyzed by foreign authors or researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Role of Translation in Indonesian Literature

The role of translation is vital in determining whether or not a literary work can be said as world literature. Through the translated version, those who cannot speak or read Indonesian

language could enjoy reading Indonesian literatures and understand them. It is true that many scholars are uncertain about the quality of the translations since translations are not original product and it might lead the readers to other interpretations. It makes the readers fail to understand the original literary product. However, translation is a crucial key in interpreting the multicultural expressions. Rose states that “translating always involves usurping the other’s voice, and the need to make multicultural expressions maximally available means that those other voices will necessarily be altered What is always true in any translation project is that there is some kind of purpose behind it and that translators must accede to that purpose, which always includes some component of decision making for two others—the source author and the target audience” (1996, p.26). Voragen also strengthens Rose’s argument by saying that “literature is a useful tool to gain insight into a foreign culture, and the rich history of Indonesian literature indeed offers, when translated, a valuable gateway to Indonesian culture” (2011, p. 39). In addition, Bayuni also stated that translation is “key” to Indonesian literature going global (2015, para 1). Hence, the translators might fulfill the purpose of voicing the ‘other’ through their translation, and providing translations for Indonesian literature helps Indonesian culture to be well known among other nations.

Specifically, there are many Indonesian literary products, especially local folks which have been translated into English. It makes other nations who are curious about Indonesian folks to be able to gain some knowledge related to Indonesian culture. For instance, a local folk from Lembang Bandung about a man named *Sangkuriang*. The story of his life is literary called the Legend of *Tangkuban Perahu*, Legend of *Sangkuriang*, or Story of *Sangkuriang*. There are many versions of translations of the failed romance of *Sangkuriang* and *Dayang Sumbi*. One of them is translated by Imam Khanafi. The English translation of *Sangkuriang* has also been published online in famous open educational resources websites, such as SlideShare. It means that many people around the world able to read it freely and easily. The readers would be able to know about Indonesian culture by reading the English translation version of *Sangkuriang*.

b. Indonesian Literature as Refraction of Other Literatures in the World

The second characteristic of being world literature that has been classified by Damrosch is that world literature should be an elliptical refraction of national literatures. Indonesian literature also refracts national literatures. Day (2007) states that:

“few readers of ‘world literature’ are aware that Indonesia is home to some of the world’s oldest literary traditions. Poetic texts based on Sanskrit models and written in old Javanese, date from the beginning of the ninth century; literature in old Malay, influenced first by Sanskrit, then by Arabic and Persian, begins at about the same time. Modern Indonesian literature is the heir to both traditions as well as to literature from China and the West” (173).

This statement has verified that Indonesian literature has influenced other countries’ literature and also being refracted by them. Even for some particular stories, it has been like the source of other literatures around the world.

An important example which shows the similarity of Indonesian national folklore with other country is the story of *Sangkuriang* and *Oedipus* from Greece. Both of the stories tell about a son who loves and desires his biological mother. The end of the story was quite different. In *Sangkuriang*, the son has not succeeded to marry his mother *Dayang Sumbi*, while in *Oedipus*, the son is able to marry his mother *Jocasta*. However, these two stories clarify that Indonesian literature also is refracted and impacted by other cultures around the world since these stories share the similar theme.

Sangkuriang is a folklore which is suspected to be written by Prince *Jaya Pakuan* or better known as *Bujangga Manik* in a palm leave in the 15th century. The story was spread verbally around the community who lived in that era. Meanwhile, *Oedipus* was written by *Sophocles*. *Oedipus* and *Sangkuriang* are literary works from Greek and Indonesia. It can also be seen that although *Sangkuriang* might adopt the theme of the romance between a mother and her son, but in the story, *Sangkuriang* was not able to marry his mom because in Indonesia, a relationship between mother and son is not allowed and categorized as immoral deed.

Another famous Indonesian literary work which has similar theme with a literary work is *Mahabharata* which comes from India and Indonesia as well. Both countries are located in South-East Asia. *Mahabharata* in India and Indonesian version use the setting of Hinduism. Majority of India’s population practice Hinduism. In ancient time (at the fourth century of Kutai Kingdom in East Borneo), Indonesians practiced Hinduism. That might be the period when *Mahabharata* was well known among the Indonesian populations. Both versions of *Mahabharata* have similarity. The difference is just about the story of a character named *Drupadi*. In Indian version, *Drupadi* marry all five *Pandavas* (*Yudistira*, *Bhima*, *Arjune*, *Nakul*

and Sadeve). However, in Indonesian version, although Drupadi loves Arjune, but she is only married officially to Yudistira, the oldest brother of the five Pandavas. In Indonesian version, there is no scene when Kunti (the mother of five Pandavas) instructed Drupadi to marry five of her sons. The difference of Drupadi's characterization and behavior in the story *Mahabharata* might be influenced by the country's culture itself. In Indonesia, it is really rare and peculiar for a woman to marry more than one man. Indonesian society cannot accept this value and even against it. A woman who has more than one husband will be perceived as immoral one and will be expelled from the society. That is why, the story of *Mahabharata* in Indonesian version is different from the Indian version, especially in the depiction of Drupadi's characterization. These two examples proposed that Indonesian literature persuade other literatures in the world to become an elliptical refraction of national literatures. These examples fulfilled Damrosch's characteristic of world literature where one literary work refracts other literatures from around the world but adjusting the theme with its national culture or background.

c. Indonesian Literature as the Mode of Reading

Generally, knowing that a literary work is not just a compilation of texts but also mode of reading gives readers more awareness that reading activity might also determine a quality of literary product. A mode of reading can also be analyzed from author's achievement. If an author is successful to make his works read by many readers, his works are translated in English or several other languages. His literary works resonate other literary works across the world and his literary works will be analyzed by other scholars. It could be meant that his works have been a mode of reading. One of Indonesian author who fits these identifications is Pramoedya Ananta Toer. His works which have been translated into English are *The Fugitive* (Perburuan) 1950, *It's Not an All Night Fair* (Bukan Pasar Malam) 1951, and *Blora* 1952 that has been translated by Harold Merrill. *Corruption* (Korupsi) 1954, *The King, the Witch, and the Priest* (Cerita Calon Arang) 1957, *This Earth of Mankind* (Bumi Manusia) 1980 were translated by Maxwell Lane. *Child of All Nations* (Anak Semua Bangsa) 1980, *Footsteps* (Jejak Langkah) 1985, *House of Glass* (Rumah Kaca) 1988, *The Girl from the Coast* (Gadis Pantai) 1962, and *A Mute's Soliloquy* (Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu) 1995 are also translated.

One of Pramoedya's novel entitled *This Earth of Mankind* (Bumi Manusia) which was firstly published in Bahasa in 1980 have been translated into thirty-seven languages. Pramoedya

proved his work as an important literary work which is worthy to be translated into many languages. The translations in *This Earth of Mankind* are listed below:

1. *Bumi Manusia*, Hasta Mitra, 1980 (Jakarta, Indonesian)
2. *Aarde Der Mensen*, Manus Amici, 1981 (Amsterdam, Dutch)
3. *Ren Shi Jian*, Beijing Da Xue, 1982 (Beijing, Chinese)
4. *Ren Shi Jian*, Dou Shi Chu Ban Selangor, 1983 (Malaysia, Chinese)
5. *Bumi Manusia*, Wira Karya, 1983, (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian)
6. *This Earth of Mankind*, Penguin Book, 1983 (Australia, English)
7. *Garten der Menschheit*, Express Editio, 1984 (Berlin, German)
8. *Im Garten der Menschheit*, Albert Klutsch-Verlags-Vertrag, 1984 (German)
9. *Människans Jord*, Förlaget Hjulet, 1986 (Stockholm, Swedish)
10. *Ningen No Daichi*, Shinkuwara Mekong Published, 1986 (Japanese)
11. *МИР ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕКИЙ*, Radooga Moskwa 1986 (Russian)
12. *CBIT ЛЮДСЬКИЙ*, In Ukrainian, 1986 (Ukrainian)
13. *Garten der Menschheit*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987 (German)
14. *Aarde der mensen*, Unieboek, 1987 (Amsterdam, Dutch)
15. *Ang Daigdig ng Tao*, Solidaridad Publishing House, 1989 (Manila, Filipino)
16. *Questa Terra Dell'Uomo*, Il Saggiatore, 1990 (Milan, Italy)
17. *Minke*, O Neul Publishing, 1990 (Korean)
18. *This Earth of Mankind*, Penguin Book, 1990 (New York, English)
19. *This Earth of Mankind*, William Morrow & Co., Inc, 1991 (New York, English)
20. *Människans Jord*, Norstedts Förlag AB, 1992 (Stockholm, Swedish)
21. *Tierra Humana*, Txalaparta, 1995 (Navarre, Spanish)
22. *Erbe Einer Versunkenen Welt*, Verlag Volt und Welt, 1996 (German)
23. *Aarde der mensen*, Uitgeverij De Geus, 1999 (Breda)
24. *This Earth of Mankind*, Penguin Book, 2000 (Italy)
25. *Le Monde des Hommes*, Payot & Rivages, 2001 (Paris, French)
26. *Menneskenes Jord*, Pax Forlag A/S, 2001 (Oslo, Norwegian)
27. *Tiera Humana*, Ediciones Destino, S.A., 2001 (Barcelona, Spanish)
28. *Esta estranha terra*, Livros Quetzal, 2003 (Portuguese)
29. *This Earth of Mankind*, Bertrand Editorial, 2002 (Portuguese)

30. *This Earth of Mankind*, Leopard Förlag, 2002 (Swedish)
31. *Bumi Manusia*, Radio 68H, 2002 (Radio Broadcast, Indonesian)
32. *Människornas Jord*, Leopard Förlag, 2003 (Stockholm, Swedish)
33. ?, Alfa-Narodna Knjiga, 2003 (Serbian)
34. دھرتی کا دکھ, Mas'ud Ash'ar, 2009 (Lahore, Urdu)
35. แผ่นดินของชีวิต, Kobfai Publishing, 2003 (Thai)
36. 'Manushya Bhoomi' tr.by S.A.Qudsi,(Malayalam-Indian)- Chintha Pub-2011
37. *Bumi Manusia*, Lentera Dipantara, 2005 (Indonesian)

Pramoedya is an Indonesian author who had so many achievements during his career. *Bumi Manusia* was even translated into Dutch only after one year of its publication in Indonesia. His works have also been the favorite media for the scholars abroad to analyze any aspect regarding Indonesia. Ghazali (2007) states that:

“Pramoedya Ananta Toer bukan saja tokoh pengarang Indonesia. Ia sudah tergolong sebagai tokoh dunia. Karya-karyanya telah diterjemahkan ke-36 bahasa di dunia, dan banyak dibahas oleh ahli sastra dunia, di antaranya Foulcher (1993) dan Maier (2004). Bahkan, Maier sangat menyanjung tinggi karya Pramoedya yang nota bene adalah karya sastra yang dihasilkan oleh sastrawan beraliran realisme sosialis” (58).

“Pramoedya Ananta Toer is not only an Indonesian author. He has been classified as a world figure as well. His works have been translated into 36 languages, and many of them have been discussed by experts of world literature, including Foulcher (1993) and Maier (2004). In fact, Maier admired Pramoedya’s works which incidentally are literary works produced by writers who support socialist realism” (58).

Pramoedya’s works are not only translated in many languages but also studied by many scholars. It means that Pramoedya’ works have been the mode of reading. Pramoedya’s works help foreigners to understand Indonesia. Thorne (2006) claims that “his (Pramoedya) book drew me into the world of the main character, Javanese writer Minke, and the growing anti-colonial movement in Dutch-ruled Indonesia of the 1890s. The writing was deeply realist and helped me to appreciate Indonesian nationalism of the oppressed frequently has a revolutionary character”

(para.3). Thorne also clarifies that “Pram was a literary giant and inspiring political figure. Those who share his vision of completing Indonesia’s revolution have declared, *kami akan teruskan jejak langkahmu* (we will continue in your footsteps)” (para.5). By having followers, it seemed like Pramoedya’s works have been a mode of reading that needs to be pursued.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, Indonesian literatures can be said and categorized as world literature since Indonesian literary works have been translated into English and many other languages, had been an elliptical refraction of national literatures, and had been a mode of reading by having various researchers who studied about Indonesian through its literary products. It also proves that although Indonesian has been claimed as third world nation, but the author, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer, has given contribution through his literary works to show Indonesian cultural into global world.

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