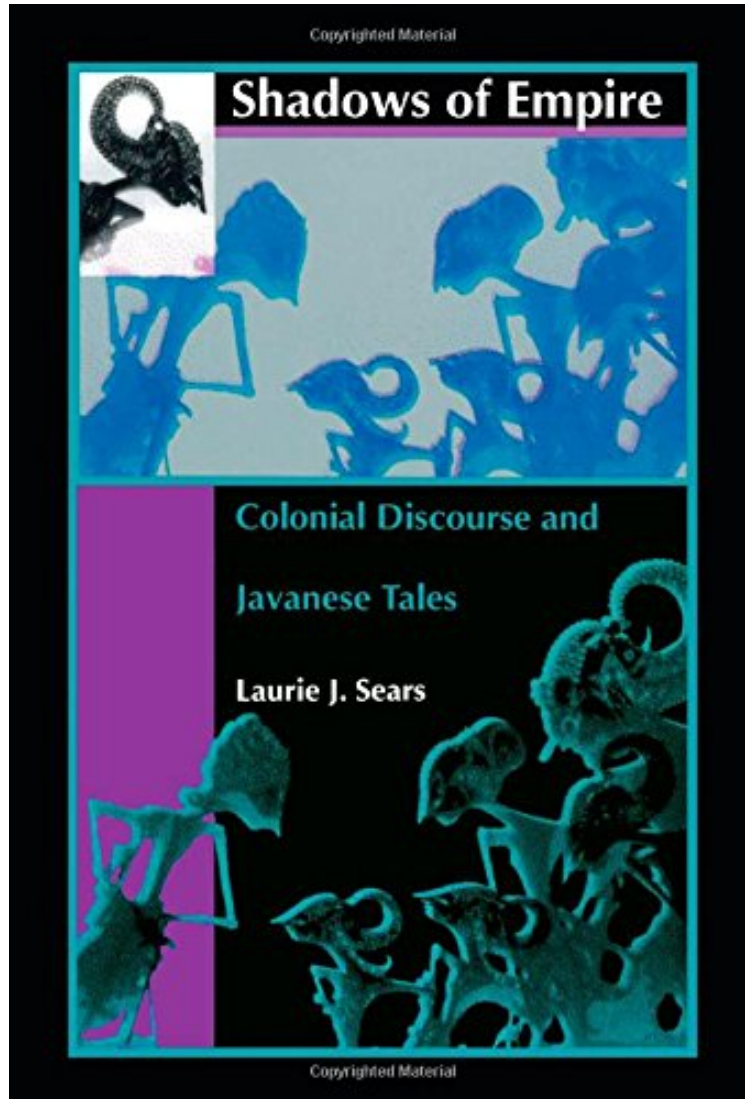


(Free pdf) Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales

Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales

Laurie J. Sears

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#2485304 in Books Duke University Press Books 1996-03-20 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.50 x 1.00 x 6.251, 1.41 #File Name: 0822316978376 pages | File size: 40.Mb

Laurie J. Sears : Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales:

21 of 30 people found the following review helpful. Weak knowledge of Wayang and Mahabharata = Flawed Book By Walter O. Koenig I don't like to write negative reviews, but in this case I feel I must because there is so little on Wayang available. I disagree with the Thesis: "...that the shadow theater as it is known today is a hybrid of Javanese and Dutch ideas and interests, inseparable from a particular colonial moment." (Dust Jacket). Just when and where was

this moment? This may sound good to Duke University Press, the publishers, and Western Academics ignorant of Java and Wayang, but it's just not that simple. I will touch only on two main points: First of all Wayang is a complex expression of not only Javanese shadow theater, but also Sundanese Wayang Golek (three dimensional rod puppet theater). It is also a combination of History, Philosophy, Religion, Literature, Music, Performance Arts and many other subjects. Many of these are foreign or incompatible with Dutch Culture. Wayang Kulit and Wayang Golek also have to be treated together, not only because of their relation, but also due to the fact that the Dutch influence was greater, longer and more complete in (Sunda) West-Java. Sears not only fails to see this important point, but her knowledge of the history of Wayang and its traditions, both in the present and past are weak. Secondly one needs to know the both the Javanese Version (Both Kawi and the Wayang Stories) and interpretation of the Mahabharata and its relation to the Sanskrit Epic, and carefully note the differences. Sears does not do this at all. In fact her knowledge of the epics are also weak, otherwise the thesis would be different. Thus, to not thoroughly know both Wayang and the Mahabharata flaws this book, so I do not even have to touch on its Postmodern / Western posturing. The writing does not flow, and the proofreading and research are also weak. No, the Netherlands were not in World War I, they were neutral (p. 164) and Sanskrit and Javanese Spelling should not be used interchangeably (p. 196). There are many more examples of this, so I better stop. This book does not enhance Wayang studies. Seek out the sources Sears cites, but does not seem to use, in the Bibliography instead. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Useful perspective on wayang By M. G. SFAELLOUI have just finished reading this work and thoroughly enjoyed it. With all respect to the other reviewer (whose other incisive and insightful reviews I have read), I believe that this book deserves a more favourable rating. In her work the author is not discussing the 'Mahabharata' per se but rather how the Javanese form of this Indian epic has been used through the 'wayang kulit' or shadow play. The author focuses mainly on the 'wayang purwa' repertoire yet does include other useful material such as the 'Murwakala' story which is used at the 'ruwatan' exorcism, etc. The author illustrates how, since Dutch occupation, the wayang has been used to make social comment. Invariably, such comment took place at a specific part of the performance called the 'gara-gara', in which the 'panakawan' or clown characters appear. Although this section does not belong to the Indian epic, it is the part that lends itself to satire and invariably when the 'dalang' (or Javanese 'dhalang'), i.e. puppeteer could voice his own political/social views. During the Dutch colonial period, the revolution for independence from the westerners could be seen in the struggle between the Pandhawa and Korawa brothers which underlies the Mahabharata: the fight between the good and just and the evil and unjust. It is perhaps surprising that the author does not refer to other forms of wayang, especially 'wayang suluh', which is centred around the theme of the struggle for independence from the Dutch. One can infer from these pages that sadly the dalang's use of expression to make positive social comment on behalf of the people became abused by the dalang themselves. Though the author mentions several contemporary dalang, whom she describes in glowing terms as most skilful artists, it seems that some of them have just degenerated into servile mouthpieces of the government. Rather than use their art to make social comment and expose injustice, etc. they were often employed to communicate the propaganda of the dictator Soeharto who sponsored them. By contrast, the Greek 'karagiozis' shadow theatre (though a less sophisticated form than wayang), has always been a mouthpiece of the people, not of the powerful establishment! The author's contribution to the study of wayang is also important in her detailed discussion about the various categories of 'lakon' or plots/stories. Her research is almost unimpeachable and her rich bibliography includes works in Dutch, Indonesian and Javanese. An extensive glossary is also provided, as well as copious foot notes and a comprehensive index.

Shadows of Empire explores Javanese shadow theater as a staging area for negotiations between colonial power and indigenous traditions. Charting the shifting boundaries between myth and history in Javanese Mahabharata and Ramayana tales, Laurie J. Sears reveals what happens when these stories move from village performances and palace manuscripts into colonial texts and nationalist journals and, most recently, comic books and novels. Historical, anthropological, and literary in its method and insight, this work offers a dramatic reassessment of both Javanese literary/theatrical production and Dutch scholarship on Southeast Asia. Though Javanese shadow theater (wayang) has existed for hundreds of years, our knowledge of its history, performance practice, and role in Javanese society only begins with Dutch documentation and interpretation in the nineteenth century. Analyzing the Mahabharata and Ramayana tales in relation to court poetry, Islamic faith, Dutch scholarship, and nationalist journals, Sears shows how the shadow theater as we know it today must be understood as a hybrid of Javanese and Dutch ideas and interests, inseparable from a particular colonial moment. In doing so, she contributes to a reenvisioning of European histories that acknowledges the influence of Asian, African, and New World cultures on European thought and to a rewriting of colonial and postcolonial Javanese histories that questions the boundaries and content of history and story, myth and allegory, colonialism and culture. *Shadows of Empire* will appeal not only to specialists in Javanese culture and historians of Indonesia, but also to a wide range of scholars in the areas of performance and literature, anthropology, Southeast Asian studies, and postcolonial studies.

Shadows of Empire casts new light on the history of Java and analyzes historiographical method in the light of

theoretical developments in the study of colonial history. Its emphasis on shadow theatre as text, as performance, and as oral tradition makes an important new contribution. Jean Gelman Taylor, University of New South Wales