Encek Peng Kun
A Poem by Remy Sylado

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Nurenzia was born in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in English Literature from Brawijaya University Malang. During her college years in 2003, she was elected to join the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) ASEAN Student Fellowships and study for a non-degree program in the National University of Singapore. The fellowships also allowed her to join other 49 students from ASEAN in fostering fellowships and building bonds for better ASEAN future.

After graduation, Nurenzia worked as an English teacher in the Language Center of University of Muhammadiyah Malang since 2007. And in 2008, she was awarded Fulbright scholarship program to continue her study in Ohio University’s Linguistics department. Starting from April 2009 up to May 2010 she was the President of PERMIAS Athens (Indonesian Student Association in the United States). In the moment, Nurenzia is finishing her Master’s degree and writing a thesis on the potential of online blogging activity and computer-mediated communication in promoting language learners’ autonomy.

SYNOPSIS
This poem was written by Remy Sylado, a famous poet and writer from Indonesia. It was read for the first time at the Indonesian Language Congress, held in the Bali Room of the Hotel Indonesia, in Jakarta, on October 16, 2003. It was also included in Remy Sylado’s collection of poems, “Puisi Mbeling” (The Naughty Poems), published by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia (KPG), Jakarta.

A Foreword to Remy Sylado’s Mbeling Poem: Encek Peng Kun

“Encek Peng Kun” is a fragment from Remy Sylado’s poetry compilation, Puisi Mbeling. Puisi Mbeling includes select Remy Sylado poems categorized into four periods: before 1972, during 1972, after 1972, and stories between 1970 and 2003. 1972 was an important year for the poet, in fact, it was the year when Sylado first introduced his invented term, “mbeling” or “defiant.” In Javanese, mbeling is used to refer to someone who is extremely clever, and can get what he wants through extraordinary actions or tricks. Remy’s choice of the Javanese word mbeling to characterize his poems reflects his closeness to Javanese culture, as he spent his childhood in Semarang and Solo, centers of Javanese culture in Indonesia. However, in contrast with the Javanese tradition of being passive as shown in the philosophies of “mikut dhewur mendhem jero” and “wani ngalah luhur pungkasane,” the word mbeling is intended to include Sylado’s criticism of the New Order regime and the Horison-centered world of
Indonesian literature. The *mbeling* movement conveys social criticism in a compelling and playful way, and the movement believes that words in poetry should not always be beautiful and sweet. *Mbeling* poetry allows writers to be extremely creative, to go beyond the ordinary, and to make use of daily expressions, playful words, and even profanity.

Through the spirit of *mbeling*, Remy brings us into the realm of Encek Peng Kun. Encek, a man of Chinese descent, is depicted as a laidback but artful man seeking legal Indonesian citizenship. As the main theme revolves around how Encek faces a series of tests in front of an Indonesian judge, readers may laugh at Encek’s amusing way of answering the judge’s questions. But underneath it all, one can also sense the inevitable pain upon rejection and the uncertain search for belongingness, as Encek Peng Kun is forced to stand in a courtroom only to answer trivial questions about a place he calls home. Readers are able to extract the message of how Chinese are somehow forced to remain foreign despite their being Indonesian at heart.

Encek Peng Kun and his Chinese ancestors had endured many difficult times. In the second verse of Sylado’s poem, he refers to the dark days of a mass execution in 1740 during the colonial period, and the absurd *three* and half decades of “colonialism” during the New Order, the *three* and half years of Japanese occupation, and the long and enduring *three* and half centuries of the Dutch East Indies era. The similarity in the numbers produces a dramatic effect, reminding us of how the Indonesian nation’s dignity has been long raped, by *three* different kinds of rulers – the Western “Other,” the Asian, and even the Indonesian.

During the Old Order of Sukarno, the Chinese were forced to choose between dual citizenship or becoming a Chinese citizen. At that time, Chinese were among the group of “others”, of the non-*pribumi* or the non-native Indonesian. Leo Suryadinata, a scholar of the Indonesian Chinese, refers to this situation as the “dis-trust of a minority group which was not only strong economically but also ‘unassimilable’.” Time went on and the New Order of Suharto terminated the dual nationality policy. Prior to the new policy, a process of naturalization was required in order to receive the legal status of Indonesian citizenship.

Yet, a concept of homogeneity under *Pancasila* – the five state Principles – was being introduced by the New Order. *Pancasila* states that the nation should be united under the belief in one Supreme God, humanism, nationalism, popular sovereignty, and social justice. Based on those five principles, the *Program Pembauran* (Assimilation Program) was introduced. And therefore, Encek has to go back and forth to the courtroom to obtain legal proof that he is worthy to be Indonesian, and is willing to receive a Javanese name to replace his Chinese name.

Although Kuntarto Winoto, Encek’s new Javanese name, sounds local, it is a modification from his surname, Kun. To Kun was added tarto to become Kuntarto, a very common Javanese name. Under the New Order, a law regarding Chinese Indonesian names was passed, one of the most visible results of the law was the transformation of most Chinese Indonesian surnames into Indonesian sounding names. In another example, the original Chinese name of Wang was changed to Wongsosaputro. This name changing was intended to assimilate the Indonesians of Chinese descent, but it was also ironic as it betrayed the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) propagated by the Indonesian government.

Throughout the question and answer dialogue that serves as the main plot of the poem, Remy presents a clash of interests between Encek, a representative of someone of Chinese descent, and the judge, who symbolizes the New Order government. Often Encek cannot appreciate the symbols of nationalism (the verses in *Pancasila*, the photographs of Suharto and Kartini, and the national anthem). Encek always gives nonsensical answers, and some of his witty answers are related to the fact that most people of Chinese descent in Indonesia work in the business and economic sector. When Encek was asked to recite the verses in *Pancasila*, he confused the third and fourth verses with popular Indonesian product brands. Instead of saying “two, humanism”, he says, “two horns/dua culas”. Some other product brands mentioned by Encek are three diamonds/tiga belian and *Nyonya Meneer*. This may be subtle, yet the stereotype of Chinese as economically oriented is vividly personified in Remy’s character. Reading this poem, one cannot resist falling in love with Encek Peng Kun. He is honest, humorous, witty, and ingenious. Why can’t such a man get a certificate of citizenship from the Indonesian government? When he cannot answer the nationalistic questions correctly, it is not because he is ignorant; rather, he seems only to...
be challenging those institutions as a sign of resentment. Perhaps it was also why Kuntarto Winoto (alias Enceh Peng Kun) refuses to be involved in the country’s General Election, opting not to vote at all. It is ironic that having a Javanese name and a legal certificate of citizenship is not enough to make him want to vote.
Encek Peng Kun

Encek Peng Kun was born in Jakarta from a grandfather and grandmother who had resided in Batavia since Adriaen Veckenier’s massacre of the Chinese

Though he was always an Indonesian at heart Encek Peng Kun had never had a valid certificate of citizenship. It had been difficult for him to get one during the New Order Regime which lasted for three and a half decades which was different from the Japanese colonization which lasted for three and a half years which was different from the Dutch colonization which lasted for three and a half centuries.

In order to obtain a certificate of citizenship and change his name into a Javanese name Encek Peng Kun had to pass several tests in front of a judge from the special court.

The first test given by the judge was an easy question normally recited by elementary school students.

The judge said, “Encek Peng Kun, what are the verses in Pancasila?”

Encek Peng Kun answered plainly, “Hayya, everybody knows lah, altogether thele ale five, One, believe in the one and only God, Two holns, Three Diamonds, Foul, Health, and Five, Pelfection.”

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun to come back the next morning.

The next morning, slowly Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be tested.

The judge said, “Since you failed the test yesterday today you must answer the question correctly If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship” The judge then showed him a big photograph of Suharto and asked, “Whose face is this?”

Encek Peng Kun answered plainly, “Hayya, everybody knows lah, that’s Sukalno.” The judge yelled, “No! This is Suharto” As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied, “Hayya, they’re all the same lah, both of them weal kopiah.”

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun to come back the next morning.

The next morning, slowly Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be tested.

The judge said, “Since you failed the test yesterday today you must answer the question correctly If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship” The judge then showed him a big photograph of Kartini and asked, “Whose face is this?”

Encek Peng Kun answered plainly, “Hayya, everybody knows lah, that’s a bland of Jamu Nyonya Meneel from Semarang.” The judge yelled, “No! This is Kartini” As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied, “Hayya, they’re all the same lah, both of them weal hail buns.”

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun to come back the next morning.

The next morning, slowly Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be tested.

As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied, “Hayya, they’re all the same lah, both of them weal self-defense”

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun to come back the next morning.

The next morning, slowly Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be tested.

The judge said, “Since you failed the test yesterday today you must answer the question correctly If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship” The judge then showed him a big photograph of Suharto and asked, “Whose face is this?”

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The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun to come back the next morning.

The next morning, slowly Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be tested.

The judge said, “Since you failed the test yesterday today you must answer the question correctly If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship” The judge then showed him a big photograph of Kartini and asked, “Whose face is this?”

Encek Peng Kun answered plainly, “Hayya, everybody knows lah, that’s a bland of Jamu Nyonya Meneel from Semarang.” The judge yelled, “No! This is Kartini” As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied, “Hayya, they’re all the same lah, both of them weal hail buns.”

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun to come back the next morning.

The next morning, slowly Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be tested.
The judge said, “Since you failed the test yesterday today you must answer the question correctly
If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship”. Unlike the other day, Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “I am not going to fail again today”
The judge said, “Today you only need to sing ‘Indonesia Raya’, the National Anthem”
Unlike the other day, Encek Peng Kun was very sure of himself and said, “I am the number-one singer”.

As he stood up straight Encek Peng Kun began to sing, “Indonesia, ‘you’ native land
The land where ‘you’ shed ‘your’ blood”
The judge yelled, “Hey! It’s not supposed to be ‘your’ but ‘my’”
Encek Peng Kun suddenly was not calm and plain anymore, “Hayya, then you first need to sign my certificate of citizenship.
Once you sign it, I will sing ‘my’
Before your sign it, I will sing ‘you’”.

The judge was infuriated, but he decided to give in, “Okay, I will sign it now
From now on your name is: Kuntarto Winoto

Just outside the courtroom the judge said, “During the General Election you must vote for one of the three big parties: PPP, Golkar, PDI.
Which one will you consider?”
Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “Hayya, I will vote for none of them”.
The judge said, “That’s unacceptable! You must vote for Golkar”.

Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “Hayya, I don’t want to, my life will be difficult
If Golkar wins, there will be development everywhere
And I have to let go of part of my house for a public road”.
The judge said, “Then vote for PDI”.
Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “Hayya, I don’t want to, my life will be difficult
The ‘Buffalo’ party belongs to Sukarno
During Sukarno’s era, my money was cut
So if PDI wins, my money will be cut again”
The judge said, “Then just vote for PPP”
Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “Hayya, I don’t want to, my life will be more difficult
If PPP wins, syariah Islam will be imposed
And my penis will be circumcisioned”
The judge said, “So what will you vote for?”
Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “Hayya, I will vote for ‘Golput’”.
The judge said, “‘Golput’ is not allowed”
Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, “Hayya, what do I care?”

The original text

Encek Peng Kun
Encek Peng Kun lahir di Jakarta
dari kakek-nenek yang sudah membumi di Batavia sejak Adriaen Velckenier membantai orang Cina
Walau sudah mengindonesia sekian lama
Encek Peng Kun belum punya surat warganegara
sebab dipersulit selama penjajahan Orde Baru yang memakan waktu tiga setengah dasawarsa
dan tak sama dengan penjajahan Jepang yang memakan waktu tiga setengah tahun
dan tak sama dengan penjajahan Belanda yang memakan waktu tiga setengah abad

Untuk memperoleh surat warganegara
dan mengganti namanya dengan nama Jawa
Encek Peng Kun harus mengikuti ujian-ujian
di hadapan hakim pengadilan khusus

Ujian pertama yang diajukan hakim adalah pertanyaan hafal-hafalan anak SD
Kata hakim, “Encek Peng Kun, coba sebut ayat-ayat Pancasila.”
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya, “Hayya, semua orang tahu la, ada lima macam
Kesatu, kehutanan yang maha esa,
dua cula, tiga belian, ampat sehat, lima sempulna.”

Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kunembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini

Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap uji.
Kata hakim, “Karena anda gagal kemarin hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar
Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda tidak bakalan saya tandatangani
Nah, siapa penggali Pancasila?"
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya,
"Hayya, semua orang tahu, Kho Ping Ho dali Solo
banyak kalang buku-buku celita 'pencak-silat'.
Hakim membentak, "Bukan pencak-silat, tapi Panca-
sila!"
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya
"Hayya, sama la, dua-dua alat bela dili."
Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun
kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini
Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap diuji
Kata hakim, "Karena Anda gagal kemarin
hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar
Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda
tidak bakalan saya tandatangani."
Hakim menunjukkan foto besar Suharto
sambil bertanya, "Wajah siapa ini?"
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya
"Hayya, semua orang tahu la, itu Sukalno.
Hakim membentak, "Bukan! Ini Suharto."
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya,
"Hayya, sama la, dua-dua pakai kopiah."
Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun
kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini
Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap diuji
Kata hakim, "Karena Anda gagal kemarin
hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar
Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda
tidak bakalan saya tandatangani."
Hakim menunjukkan foto besar Ibu Kartini
sambil bertanya, "Wajah siapa ini?"
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya,
"Hayya, semua orang tahu la, itu Ibu Kartini.
Hakim membentak, "Bukan! Ini Ibu Kartini."
Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya
"Hayya, sama la, dua-dua pake konde."
Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun
kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini
Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap diuji
Kata hakim, "Karena Anda gagal kemarin
hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar
Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda
tidak bakalan saya tandatangani."
Tumben Encek Peng Kun tidak lugu
berkata yakin, "Sekalang owe tidak gagal lagi."
Kata hakim, "Hari ini Anda hanya cukup menyanyi
lagu kebangsaan 'Indonesia Raya'."
Tumben Encek Peng Kun tidak lugu
berkata yakin, "Soal nyanyi owe nomel satu."
dan sambil berdiri tegak Encek Peng Kun menyanyi,
"Indonesia, tanah air-'mu'"
"Tanah tumpah dahah-'mu'.""Hakim membentak, "Hei! bukan 'mu' tapi 'ku'."
Jawab Encek Peng Kun tidak lugu lagi,
"Hayya, kalo begitu tandatangan dulu
owe punya sulat warganegara.
Kalu sudah tandatang, owe nyanyi 'ku'
Sebelum tandatang, owe nyanyi 'mu'."
Hakim geram, tapi mengalah, katanya, "Ya, sudah
Saya tandatangani sekarang juga
Mulai sekarang nama Anda: Kuntarto Winoto
Di luar sidang pengadilan hakim berkata,
"Nanti pemilu Anda harus pilih salah satu
dari tiga partai besar: PPP, Golkar, PDI.
Kira-kira Anda pilih yang mana?"
Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin
"Hayya, owe tidak pilih mana-mana."
Kata hakim, "Tidak boleh! Anda harus pilih Golkar."
Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin
"Hayya, tidak mau, owe bisa susah
Kalu Golkal menang, pembangunan di mana-mana
lantas owe punya lumah kena potong dibikin jalan."
Kata hakim, "Kalau begitu pilih saja PDI."
Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin
"Hayya, tidak mau, owe bisa susah
Paltai banteng paltainya Sukalno
Dulu jaman Sukalno owe punya uang kena potong
Kalu PDI menang, owe punya uang kena potong lagi."
Kata hakim, "Kalau begitu Anda pilih partai apa?"
Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin,
"Hayya, owe pilih Golput saja."
Kata hakim, “Golput tidak boleh.”
Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin,
“Hayya, emang gua pikilin?”

References


End Notes

1 The Javanese proverb “mikul dhuwur mendhem jero” was widely used during the New Order; it indicates that one has to uphold the leader’s merits as well as to suppress his mistakes. The next proverb, “wani ngalah lubur pungkasane,” suggests that winning is not true victory, that true victory is sacrifice.

2 During the 1970s, a writer was considered to be a successful poet only when his/her writings were chosen to be published in *Horizon* magazine (Prologue to *Puisi Mbeling*, 2004).

3 From an interview with Remy Sylado (Prologue to *Puisi Mbeling* 2004).

4 See Hoon, 2008 and Hariyono, 2006. In 1740 approximately 10,000 people of Chinese descent are believed to have been killed upon the orders of Adrian Velckenier, the governor general of Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) from 1695 to 1751.

5 Based on the 1946 Citizenship Act and the 1949 Round Table Agreement. See Hoon, 2008 and Suryadinata, 2002. The act states that people of Chinese descent in Indonesia should: “produce evidence that their parents were born in the territory of Indonesia and had resided there for at least ten years; and make an official declaration rejecting Chinese citizenship” (Suryadinata, 1978, p. 113).

6 Hoon and Suryadinata explain that the process was extremely complicated.

7 “This program prescribed the total dissolution of any markers and identifiers of Chineseness, and urged this problematic ethnic group (Chinese) to immerse itself in officially constructed local cultures.” See Hoon, 2002.


9 See Hariyono, 2006.