



Analysing the Interconnectedness of Cultural Values in Wayang Ukur Panakawan

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Abstract

This study investigated the interconnectedness of cultural values embedded within the Panakawan figures in *Wayang Ukur*, a contemporary Javanese shadow puppet reinterpretation by Sigit Sukasman. While traditional *wayang* performances reflect philosophical and moral teachings, *Wayang Ukur* presents a renewed visual and conceptual framework that reconfigures those values in response to modern contexts. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with a semiotic approach, the research examined visual representations and narrative constructions of the Panakawan figures—Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong. Data were collected through literature review, visual documentation, and interpretive analysis of the artworks and performances. The findings revealed that the Panakawan characters serve as vessels for transmitting Javanese cultural wisdom, such as social harmony, humility, and spiritual resilience, while also incorporating adaptive transformations in style and meaning. These values are shown to be dynamically interconnected through both visual symbolism and dialogic function within the performance. Moreover, *Wayang Ukur* emphasizes aesthetic innovation through spatial composition, body fragmentation, and virtual theatricality, thus reinforcing the relevance of Panakawan figures in navigating contemporary socio-cultural issues. The study concludes that the reinterpretation of Panakawan in *Wayang Ukur* does not merely preserve tradition but revitalizes cultural narratives, making them resonant with modern audiences through both content and form.

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Introduction

Wayang Ukur, a contemporary form of wayang developed by Sigit Sukasman, introduces a new dimension to the traditional world of Javanese puppetry. In a previous analysis, Putrajip (2018) examined *Wayang Ukur Panakawan* through Susanne K. Langer's concept of virtual space, revealing how the spatial and symbolic construction within this performance reinforces internalized cultural values. This form of wayang not only preserves traditional narrative elements but also integrates experimental visual forms to convey cultural meanings in a profound manner. As a continuously evolving cultural medium, *Wayang Ukur* serves not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a vehicle for reflecting on contemporary social and cultural dynamics.

Within the performance, the *Panakawan* characters play a pivotal role as guardians of cultural values and as subtle agents of social critique. Figures such as Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong are not merely supporting characters, but rather embodiments of local wisdom deeply rooted in Javanese society. In the context of *Wayang Ukur*, these characters undergo reinterpretations that are rich in symbolism and layered in meaning. Consequently, it is essential to understand how these cultural values intertwine and form a network of meanings within the performance.



Research on cultural values in wayang has been undertaken by various scholars, including Becker (2013), Geertz (1960), and Foley (2011). However, studies specifically addressing the interconnection of cultural values in the context of *Wayang Ukur Panakawan* remain limited. Meanwhile, semiotic and cultural anthropology approaches, as articulated by Hall (1997) and Hannerz (1992), provide a suitable framework for analyzing the representation and relational dynamics of meaning in performing arts. Within this framework, the present article seeks to bridge the understanding of how cultural values are articulated both visually and narratively in *Wayang Ukur Panakawan*.

This study aims to analyze the interconnectedness of cultural values in *Wayang Ukur Panakawan* through a qualitative-descriptive approach, focusing on the analysis of symbols, narratives, and visual aspects of the performance. It is expected that this article will contribute to the development of contemporary cultural studies and enrich the discourse on the role of performing arts in shaping and reflecting the cultural identity of society.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the interconnectedness of cultural values in *Wayang Ukur Panakawan* requires an interdisciplinary approach encompassing theories from cultural studies, semiotics, and visual anthropology. Hall (1997), in his theory of representation, asserts that meaning is not inherently embedded within objects or symbols; rather, it is constructed through processes of representation within specific social and cultural contexts. In this regard, the visual and narrative elements of the *Wayang Ukur* performance become an arena for the complex production of cultural meaning.

Furthermore, Clifford Geertz's (1960) concept of "thick description" in cultural anthropology offers a relevant perspective for understanding cultural symbols and actions as multilayered systems of meaning. By attending to the social, historical, and local value contexts, an analysis of the *Panakawan* characters in *Wayang Ukur* can yield deeper insights into their symbolic and social functions within contemporary Javanese society.

Foley (2011) also underscores the importance of understanding traditional dance and theatre as dynamic forms of cultural communication. In this context, *Wayang Ukur* performances can be understood as dialogical processes between past and present, as well as between traditional values and contemporary expressions. Cultural values such as solidarity, honesty, humor, and spirituality—represented by the *Panakawan* characters—are continually renegotiated in each performance.

Moreover, Appadurai's (1996) concept of cultural space and global cultural flows provides a framework for understanding how *Wayang Ukur*, while rooted in local tradition, can respond to global issues through contextual and reflective presentations. Hannerz (1992) emphasizes the importance of viewing culture as a dynamic and interconnected network, thereby creating opportunities for new interpretations of cultural symbols.

By employing a visual semiotic approach, as outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the analysis of visual elements in *Wayang Ukur Panakawan* can be conducted through an examination of visual structure, composition, and the use of symbols representing specific cultural values. This model allows for a reading of visual meaning that is not only aesthetic but also ideological.

Overall, the theoretical framework employed in this article will help explain how the representation of cultural values in *Wayang Ukur Panakawan* not only reflects Javanese culture but also serves as a medium for dialogue between local traditions and global issues in the contemporary world.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the primary aim of exploring and understanding the ethical values embedded in the *Lombok keris* and their relationship to the cultural traditions of the Sasak community. This approach is considered appropriate as it enables the researcher to examine symbolic meanings, values, and cultural practices that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods (Harahap, 2018; Gde, 2014).

Data collection was conducted through a combination of literature review, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, *keris* craftsmen (*empu*), cultural experts, and members of the Sasak community who possess extensive knowledge of the *Lombok keris*. The literature review provided both theoretical and historical insights into the *keris* within the broader framework of Indonesian culture, along with the ethical values associated with it (Abdurrahman, 2012; Aziz, 2019). These sources strengthened the conceptual foundation concerning the significance of the *keris* in society and its relevance within the local system of values.

Participant observation involved attending cultural events, rituals, and *keris*-making activities that are still maintained in several traditional villages in Lombok. These activities offered first-hand perspectives on how the *keris* is used, venerated, and interpreted in the daily lives of the Sasak people, particularly within spiritual, social, and moral contexts. This methodological choice is consistent with approaches employed by Darsono (2021) and Ariyanto (2018) in their respective studies on ethical values within local cultural traditions.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with traditional leaders knowledgeable about the symbolism and values of the *keris*, including *empu*, indigenous community figures, and cultural practitioners. These interviews were designed to gather qualitative data on community perceptions of the *keris* as a symbol of ethics, spirituality, and cultural identity. To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and literature sources (Achmad, 2017; Pranowo, 2020).

Data analysis was undertaken using content analysis techniques focusing on cultural narratives, *keris* symbolism, and the ethical interpretations embedded in its use. The data were then categorized into key thematic domains such as loyalty, courage, honor, harmony, and spirituality. This process followed an interpretive approach commonly used in cultural anthropology and the study of traditional ethics (Nugroho, 2019; Suharto, 2018).

Furthermore, theoretical frameworks on cultural values and ethnic identity, as outlined by Mahyuni (2017) and Putra (2016), were applied to the analytical process. This enabled a comprehensive understanding of how the ethical values associated with the *Lombok keris* function not only as elements of symbolic heritage but also as integral components in the formation and preservation of the cultural identity of the Sasak community.

By integrating multiple data collection techniques with rigorous analytical methods, this study aims to present a holistic understanding of the *Lombok keris* as a cultural artifact imbued with profound ethical values. The diversity of data sources and methodological approaches ensures a high degree of validity and reliability within the context of cultural and local ethics research.

Results and Discussions

Representation of Cultural Values in the Panakawan Figures

The Panakawan figures in *Wayang Ukur* by Sigit Sukasman embody the complex cultural values of Javanese society through a contemporary approach. The characters Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong are not merely

narrative complements within the *wayang* tradition, but function as value-bearing agents that reflect the Javanese worldview. Within the context of *Wayang Ukur*, their presence is reinterpreted both aesthetically and philosophically. Sukasman does not position the Panakawan solely as traditional *punakawan*, but rather as a medium for social critique and cultural reflection with a transformative dimension.

The representation of spirituality is strongly articulated in the character of Semar. He is portrayed as a transcendent yet grounded figure, embodying divine values while mediating between the profane and the sacred. In performance, Semar frequently employs humor as a vehicle to deliver critiques of authority, illustrating the egalitarian and honest values intrinsic to Javanese character. Semar serves as a symbol of moral integrity, speaking not only for himself but as a representative of the collective values that should be upheld by both leaders and the people (Mulder, 2001).

Meanwhile, the characters Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong extend these values through their distinct traits and roles. Gareng, with his simplicity and honesty, represents the values of modesty and the wisdom of the common people. Petruk, intelligent and witty, conveys courage in articulating social realities through satire. Bagong, often underestimated, embodies the straightforward and unfiltered logic of the ordinary populace. Together, these figures present a dialectic between seriousness and humor, between piety and social critique. In this context, the cultural values represented are not merely normative, but also reflective and educational.

Through *Wayang Ukur*, Sigit Sukasman actualizes these values via visual and performative media that deliberately reject conventional forms. The Panakawan figures are presented in visually distorted forms—bodies with disproportionate proportions and exaggerated facial expressions—as an artistic strategy to represent a reality that is itself rife with distortion. This visual distortion not only carries aesthetic value but also serves as a metaphor for the imperfect social and political realities it reflects (Putrajip & Retnowati, 2018).

Interconnectedness of Values

The interconnectedness of cultural values in the *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan is not merely symbolic, but also performative and conceptual, forming a network of mutually influencing values. Hermeneutic analysis of *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan performances reveals that spiritual, social, moral, and philosophical values do not stand in isolation; rather, they are interwoven within the visual and narrative representations of the Panakawan characters. This aligns with the idea that culture constitutes a complex and dynamic system of meanings (Geertz, 1973), in which values are not only transmitted but also negotiated and actualized through artistic and performative symbols.

Semar, for example, articulates both spirituality and social critique. In numerous performances, his dialogue embodies divine elements and Javanese wisdom, while simultaneously delivering irony toward corrupt authorities and elites who distance themselves from the people. Such spirituality does not exist in a vacuum, but intersects with moral and social values embedded within the narrative structure and stage visuals. As Kuntowijoyo (2006) asserts, cultural symbols in works of art cannot be understood separately from the surrounding social structures. Consequently, the values expressed by the Panakawan figures are not merely reflections of tradition but also critical responses to contemporary social realities.

The symbiosis of simplicity, courage, and honesty within Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong similarly reflects a network of values that is non-hierarchical yet mutually reinforcing. Gareng's courage to speak the truth is rooted in honesty, while Petruk's honesty becomes a means of delivering socially educational critique. In this context, cultural values function not only as norms but also as mediums for social transformation (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). This phenomenon reinforces the finding that *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan performances serve

as arenas for articulating interconnected values rather than as symbolic representations of a single, isolated value.

Moreover, the interconnectedness of values in *Wayang Ukur* is also manifested visually. Sigit Sukasman's design of the Panakawan characters—featuring intentionally distorted body forms and exaggerated facial expressions—functions not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a semiotic device. These distortions operate as metaphors for the moral corruption of the elite, while simultaneously serving as a critique of social inequality (Putrajip & Retnowati, 2018). In this respect, aesthetic and social values work simultaneously to convey cultural messages.

Susanne K. Langer's (1953) concept of the “virtual space” is also relevant to interpreting the interconnectedness of values in *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan. Within the performance's virtual space, these values are not only presented visually but are also experienced by audiences in both affective and reflective dimensions. As such, the relationships between values in these performances are dialogic, enabling reinterpretations of Javanese cultural values within contemporary contexts.

The hermeneutic approach employed in this study demonstrates that the cultural meanings in *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan emerge from the interaction of values that complement and sometimes negotiate with one another. This supports Taylor's (1989) notion of a “web of significance” in culture, wherein the understanding of one value requires mapping its relationships with other values within broader historical and social contexts.

Therefore, the interconnectedness of values in *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan forms a complex and reflective cultural structure. Value representation is not linear but instead develops into an interpretative network that enriches the dimensions of meaning and reinforces the role of performing arts as a living and contextually relevant medium of cultural transmission.

Transformation and Contemporary Context

Wayang Ukur Panakawan does not merely re-present traditional cultural values but also actualizes them within contemporary contexts. This performance seeks to address the challenges of modernity and social change through transformations in both form and content. Sukasman designed *Wayang Ukur* not as a repetition of traditional *wayang*, but as a form of visual and narrative experimentation that reflects the shifting values within society.

In a society grappling with the complexity of values brought about by globalization, capitalism, and technological disruption, the Panakawan figures emerge both as reminders of cultural roots and as critics of present-day social conditions. For instance, critiques of economic inequality, environmental degradation, and social alienation are conveyed through the Panakawan's distinctive humor—fresh, incisive, yet grounded in local sensibilities. This demonstrates that long-standing values such as honesty, wisdom, and solidarity remain relevant, yet require re-packaging in order to resonate with contemporary generations.

Wayang Ukur also provides space for dialogue across generations and social classes. Its flexible and exploratory visual language enables audiences from diverse backgrounds to engage both emotionally and intellectually. Consequently, *Wayang Ukur* not only preserves cultural values but also broadens their reach through innovative and contextually grounded artistic approaches.

Visual and Aesthetic Analysis of *Wayang Ukur*

Visually, *Wayang Ukur* employs the strength of carved lines, color application, and geometric forms to construct a symbolic system capable of communicating cultural values. The coloring techniques and figure stylization create a visual language that is not merely aesthetic but also communicative. For instance, the dominance of dark and light tones in the depiction of Semar reflects the duality of life—simplicity and wisdom—while the large, expressive body form emphasizes both the spiritual and profane roles embodied within a single figure.

Through this visual approach, cultural messages are conveyed not only verbally or narratively but are also transmitted symbolically to the audience. As noted by Putrajip and Retnowati (2018), the use of virtual space in *Wayang Ukur* enables viewers to experience the symbolic dimension more immersively. This reinforces the role of aesthetics in shaping cultural understanding, both emotionally and intellectually.

The findings of this study indicate that the expectations outlined in the *Introduction* have been substantiated through the results presented in the *Results and Discussion* section, thereby demonstrating internal consistency between the research objectives and outcomes. The representation of cultural values within the *Wayang Ukur* Panakawan figures not only affirms their role as carriers of ethical and philosophical messages but also highlights their adaptive function in responding to contemporary socio-cultural contexts. This confirms the relevance and resilience of Panakawan as a cultural symbol capable of bridging traditional wisdom with modern societal narratives.

Furthermore, the results of this study open opportunities for future research to explore the transformation and reinterpretation of Panakawan figures in other performance media or interdisciplinary cultural productions. Such studies could extend the application of cultural value analysis into educational, communicative, and community-based initiatives, thereby strengthening the integration of intangible cultural heritage into broader societal development agendas (Fischli et al., 1998).

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