



# Symbolism of the Ideology of Javanese Knights Based on the Iconography of the Visual Form of Punakawan in Javanese *Wayang Purwa*

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## Abstract

*Wayang purwa* is a product of Javanese culture which constructs a world of symbols. The depiction of *wayang* figures does not represent human figures but the symbolisation of human characters and qualities. The research goal is to reveal hidden messages of the four *punakawan wayang*: Sêmamar, Garèng, Pétruk, and Bagong, who are loyal followers of Arjuna in Javanese *wayang purwa*. Javanese puppets are indeed sourced from *Mahabharata*, but the four figures are additional figures from the creators. The research method is explorative qualitative and based on iconographical theory. The results of the study show that Sêmamar symbolises 'spirituality', a Javanese knight must have a high level of spirituality; Garèng symbolises 'personal awareness', a knight must have awareness as an imperfect being; Pétruk symbolises a 'visionary', a knight must be able to look far into the future, and Bagong symbolises 'holistic awareness', a knight must also have empathy for his surroundings. *Wayang* should be understood as a world of symbols, but positioning the iconography of *wayang* from a representation of a human figure to the symbolisation of 'character and aptitude' is an 'extreme interpretation' within the boundaries of an interpretative study. This is a way of understanding Javanese culture in a cosmological context; what appears is not real because what is essential is invisible.

**Keywords:** iconography; javanese; puppet; punakawan; *wayang purwa*

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## INTRODUCTION

In Javanese, *wayang* means shadow, and the second syllable of this word, *Yang*, (*Hyang*) means spirit, soul, God, or something that is deified (Hazue, 1979). Van der Tuuk (as cited in Hazeu, 1979) defines *wayang* as something that moves, is dimly lit, goes back and forth, and hovers. Therefore, the word '*wayang*' can be understood to mean a soul or spirit that floats around. In

its literal sense, the meaning of '*wayang*' is a traditional Javanese puppet made from buffalo hide (*bêlulang*), which is flattened with a length of between 1 and 3 feet, carved, coloured, fastened to a stick, and tends to have a strange, 'hyper-realistic' shape. In a broader sense, '*wayang*' refers to a stage show of a traditional Javanese drama using *wayang* (puppets) or real people (Holt, 2000). The Javanese community understands *wayang* as puppets that

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portray mythological figures from the past and from the world of the gods, which are used to enact a story in a performance of traditional art, known as *pakêliran*, which refers to the space or world where the story takes place.

Branders (as cited in Hazeu, 1897) points out that *wayang* has been known in the Javanese community since approximately 778 AD (700 Çaka). The oldest records showing the origin of Javanese *wayang* were written on stone inscriptions dating back to the year 907, from the time of King Dyah Balitung (892-9010 AD). They can be found on the walls of *Lara Jonggrang* Temple in the Prambanan Temple complex in Central Java, Indonesia (Mulyono, 1979). One part of this inscription contains the words *mawayang buat Hyang*, which means to perform *wayang* for the gods, as a kind of ritual or ceremonial offering for the gods at a local monastery or sacred building in a district or area of free land known as *pêrdikan* (Holt, 2000).

Some experts say that *wayang* has Indian (Hindu) origins, while others say it is an original art form belonging to the ancient Indonesian nation, specifically Java. G.A.J. Hazeu (1897), an expert on Javanese literature and culture from the Netherlands, in his doctoral dissertation from the University of Leiden at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, states that *wayang purwa* did not come from India. This is based on the technical terms used in performances, which do not originate from Sanskrit but instead from the Javanese language (Guritno, 1988). Rassers reinforces this opinion, writing that *wayang* performance underwent an evolution from its original form as an ancient initiation rite and that all its equipment and techniques of execution use Javanese terms (Holt, 2000). The results of research by Professor Kern and Dr. Branders show that Hindu elements are only an external coating which encases the original basic material from the Indonesian or Javanese culture (Hazeu, 1897).

Throughout the historical journey of Javanese *wayang*, the Hindu-Indian influence cannot be denied (Krom, as cited

in Pigeaud, 1967), but this is not to say that the art in its entirety originates from India. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics are indeed the sources for the storylines (*lakon*) of many performances, but stories of development (*lakon carangan*) have appeared in greater variety, detail, and depth. One example of this is the figure Arjuna [Figure 1.a], also known as Janaka has five siblings, namely Judistira, Bima, Nakula, and Sadéwa, who appear in the *Mahabharata*, but in the creators of *wayang purwa* is accompanied by four special servants, called *punakawan* [Figure 1.b], or sometimes *Panakawan*, who go by the names "Sêmar, Garèng, Pétruk, and Bagong." These figures are original Javanese art and culture creations, not found in the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*.

The study of the four *punakawan* figures became important in the enrichment of Javanese *wayang* philosophy because the meaning of these figures was not as a depiction of ordinary human figures but as symbols of the character traits fulfilled for Arjuna as a Javanese knight. The main purpose of this article is to explain the Javanese symbol system. The real symbolisation is not the apparent, but what is behind it.

The existence of the mythological figure Arjuna is highly revered in the Javanese community, not only as a member of the *Pandawa* family, known to favour virtue and truth, but also as a symbol of a 'real man'. Regardless of the Indian version of the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna is a symbol of universal masculinity or *lêlanangin jagad* (Suwandono, 1991), whose legend has been perfected in various mythological revelations. Narrations about Arjuna in the world of *wayang* are abundant, and everything associated with him is described as an object of his perfection. A study by Firdausy entitled *Konsep Cipta dalam Arjuna Wiwaha* in *Jurnal Melayu* explains that in Sanskrit, Arjuna means to shine bright, white, and clean, which can be taken to mean honest in both face and mind (Elfirdausy, Yunos, & Idris, 2015).

Leadership is about power, autho-

rity, emotional connections, authenticity, and spiritual values (Krishnakumar in Wahid, Mustamil, & Mustaffa, 2019). The depiction of Arjuna as a perfect man is truly complete, beginning with his supernatural powers and intelligence, his noble characteristics, his calm, polite behaviour, his love of meditation, his magical weapons gifted by the gods, his perfect face and physical proportions, his many beautiful wives, ranging from princesses to angels, and his four faithful companions whose position, role, and supernatural powers are difficult to guess. In the journal *Nirmana*, Tanudjaja writes that the four *punakawan* figures are presented in a way that matches the conditions of the Javanese community in terms of their various characters and roles, ranging from advisors to knights, entertainers to social critics, clowns, and even the source of truth and virtue (Tanudjaja, 2004). The results of a study by Izzati in *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah dan Studi Keagamaan* also describe Sêmâr as a figure who always emanates values of life wisdom (Izzati, 2016). In the journal *Humaniora*, Sêmâr is described as a symbol of affection, the centre of life and existence, whose job is to guard, accompany, and guide people's life in the real world (Christianto, 2003). Meanwhile, Hidayati writes in the proceeding of *WesTech 2018* that the representation of the *punakawan* is a personal branding strategy that can build public perception (Hidayati, Winarni, Pratama, & Nurfarkhana, 2018).

The existence of the *punakawan* enables a strategy of persuasion to perfect the existence of Arjuna. The four *punakawan wayang* figures in the performing art *wayang purwa* from Java, Indonesia, are not final because other forms of study from different theoretical perspectives will of course, produce new and different interpretations. This study aims to produce a new understanding that the existence of the *punakawan* as servants of Arjuna cannot simply be interpreted as a person (human being) as currently understood by society but rather a symbolic entity that Javanese knights or leaders must possess. Therefore, it is ho-

ped that further studies will appear, particularly with themes of traditional art and local wisdom, which will build a better understanding and macro interpretation of inspiring values for the development of the field of Humanities in the future.

## METHOD

The study of *wayang punakawan* from Surakarta Central Java Indonesia is based on visual form studies using an explorative qualitative research method. Data sources and collection techniques are: 1) Informant, utilising in-depth interview techniques (May, 2002) in the form of discussions with Professor Ki Kasidi Hadiprayitno, *dhalang* [1] from Yogyakarta, Professor Timbul Haryono from the Anthropology Department at UGM Yogyakarta. Interviews in the form of short discussions were also conducted with eighteen *wayang* appreciators in six *wayang* shows in several different places in Surakarta; 2) Iconographical analysis was performed on *wayang* figures of Arjuna, Sêmâr, Garèng, Pétruk, Bagong, and other related puppets. It was used as an object of study, collections of the Museum UNS Surakarta, and had been performed at Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah Surakarta, and Ki *Dhalang* Sularno's private collection from Karanganyar, Central Java; 3) Direct observation of *wayang* performances at: Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah, Gedung Pusat Universitas Sebelas Maret, Balai Kota Surakarta, *Wayang Wong* Sriwedari Surakarta, and Taman Hiburan Rakyat Yogyakarta, including some *wayang* shows on YouTube; 4) A library study of various literature related to *wayang* and Javanese culture.

The process of the iconographical analysis of the figures of Arjuna and the *punakawan* in *wayang purwa Jawa* was based on the theory of Erwin Panofsky and executed in three prerequisite stages, as follows: 1) A pre-iconographical description or natural subject matter based on factual and expressional aspects, namely the conception and basic philosophy of *Wayang Purwa*, 2) An iconographical analysis or formal analysis, based on *wayang* images,

story, allegory, mythology, and ideas or goals of creation, 3) An iconological interpretation or intrinsic meaning, or a synthetic intuition interpretation that takes into account nuances of 'essential tendencies' in the minds of the Javanese people and their cultural characteristics (Panofsky, 1982).

The data analysis stage is carried out using data triangulation techniques (Denzin, as cited in Berg, 1989), which is collecting similar data from different data sources. Interview results from the informants are direct observations on the *wayang purwa* show, indirect observations on the appearance of *wayang* shows on YouTube, visual analysis on the form of *wayang* visuals with iconographic analysis theory, as well as a literature review on puppets, Javanese culture, Javanese ideology and philosophy, and then compared, combined, and clarified into meaningful findings. So, every decision of meaning that leads to a conclusion about the existence of *punakawan* in the context of the story about Arjuna is the result of elaboration from various data sources.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Wayang Purwa*

The embryonal conception of Javanese *wayang* can be better understood based on the beliefs of fetishism, in which ancestral spirits were summoned through media such as images, puppets (*wayang*), masks, statues, percussion music, singing, and dancing (Sumardjo, 1997). These various art forms were abstractions of the spirit world in which they believed. Therefore, It is unsurprising that their representation was in forms that tended to be abstract, naïve, odd, complex, extremely simple, or even hideous. All this aimed to transform the dimension of ancestral spirits into real life. When Hindu (Indian) influence entered Java, it became quite adaptive because the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were also rich in the concept of the 'upper world' (the world of the gods).

During the centuries in which the beliefs of the Javanese community had the

chance to become more mature, the process of acculturation of ritual media between local beliefs and Hindu influences reached a point of perfection in the form of *wayang purwa*. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were reinterpreted and developed according to Javanese taste to become "great narratives" that far exceeded the limits of the images in these two books. The various manuscripts, collections of manuscripts (*sêrat*), and revered books (*kitab*) that were used as references for the creation of stories (*lakon*) for *wayang purwa* included: 1) Book *Kakawin Arjunawiwaha*, written by Êmpu Kanwa, a development of section III of the *Mahabharata*, the *Wanaparwa*, during the reign of King Airlangga of the Kingdom of Kediri during the period 1019-1042; 2) Book *Kakawin Bharatayuda* written by Êmpu Panuluh during the reign of Prabu Jayabaya (1135-1157); 3) Book *Gatotkacasraya* written by Êmpu Panuluh (1157-1188), part of which tells the story of Abimanyu (son of Arjuna) who was accompanied by the *punakawan* (Mulyono, 1979). There are numerous other similar books that tell detailed stories of the developments that took place in each part of the story.

The term "*purwa*" comes from the word "*parwa*" which means a part of the *Mahabharata* stories (there are 18 parvas), while in the *Ramayana* it is called "*kanda*" (there are seven kandas); and is also understood to be mean ancient ("*purba*") or from a bygone era (Haryanto, 1988). *Wayang-Purwa* subsequently came to mean a stage show of Javanese *wayang* that tells stories about the various figures and events from bygone eras, from the most distant past or the beginning of the historical journey of Java to the government of Parikesit (grandson of Arjuna) (Raffles, 2014). As *wayang purwa* became more accepted in the community, new *lakon* continued to be developed. Based on traditional principles (*pakêl*) these *lakon* can be grouped according to a number of criteria: *lakon adhapur* (sourced from the *Mahabharata*), *lakon carangan* (inspired by the *Mahabharata*), and *lakon sêmpalan* (not found in the *Mahabharata*) (Sastromidjojo, 1964). It was not wit-



hout reason that this various *lakon* emerged, because *wayang purwa* was more than simply the re-telling of stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; it had become a 'new dialectic medium' which offered educative and contemplative values about life and existence. *Wayang* figures present a broad picture of the traditional Javanese community with its various ethical and aesthetic norms (Solomonik, 1980). This is why *wayang purwa* is described as a pre-eminent creation: it has reached a conceptual pinnacle and contains the most basic and universal philosophical values.

Raffles (2014) writes that tradition re-designed *wayang* figures in a very strange form, deviating from realistic anatomy and being highly fantastic in appearance, first created by *Sunan Muria* [2]. This method was based on an endeavour to align the preservation of local art with Islamic teachings, which tended to avoid the depiction of human figures and living creatures. The visual form of *wayang purwa* is a 'hyper-abstraction'[3] of figures from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, not in an attempt to re-portray the biography of these figures on the stage, but as a sublimation of images to become a world of symbols. The visual symbolisation of Javanese *wayang* is not a reference to something that already exists, but rather the implementation of something that it is hoped or wished will come into being. Kant also stresses that the sublime is something that proves that the spiritual possesses powers that exceed standard feelings (Kant, 1987).

### Wayang Figure of Arjuna

Arjuna is one of the main figures in the *Mahabharata* book, the third of five children of *Pandu*, who are also known as the *Pandawa* family and are *Judistira*, *Bima*, *Arjuna*, *Nakula*, and *Sadewa* (Raffles, 2014). Arjuna's father is called *Pandu* and his mother is *Dewi Kunthi* (*Prita*). King *Pandu* is the 'chosen' heir of the Kingdom of *Hastinapura*, ruled by King *Wiyasa* or *Abiyasa* (*Vyasa*), who is also the grandfather of the five *Pandawa* brothers. The Javanese *wayang purwa* version tells how

*Pandu* falls ill and is on his deathbed after going against the will of the gods and borrowing *Lembu Nandini*, the vehicle belonging to *Bathara Guru*, to fulfil the wish of his pregnant wife, *Dewi Madrim*. For the time being, the rule of the kingdom is handed to *Pandu's* half-brother from a different father, *Drêstarastra*, while waiting until one of *Pandu's* sons is old enough to take over as king. The blind *Drêstarastra* [4] is a descendant of King *Citragada*, not the son of *Wiyasa*. Because of his blindness, he is referred to as "*kuru*" (Javanese = emaciated), and his family are known as the *Kurawa* or the *Kuru* family. On the other hand, because of a 'romantic grudge' against King *Pandu*, *Dèwi Gëndari* [5] (*Gandari*), wife of *Drêstarastra* who is also the older sister of *Sêngkuni* (*Sakuni*), intends not to return the throne of *Hastinapura* to the *Pandawa* but to make sure it stays under the control of the *Kurawa* family (Suwandono, 1991). This prolonged conflict between the *Pandawa* and *Kurawa* families over the right to rule the throne of *Hastinapura* leads to the great battle of *Bharatayuda*, in which all the main figures in this epic story play their own important roles.



**Figure 1.** Arjuna and the *punakawan* (*Sèmar*, *Garèng*, *Pétruk*, and *Bagong*) (and  
Sources: (a) (Andreacchi, 2017) and (b) (Mbambung, 2012)

Based on the injustice afflicting the *Pandawa* family in the great narrative of the *Mahabharata*, the creators of Javanese *wayang* evidently decided to explore the heroic images of the *Pandawa* brothers without any limits. Arjuna is chosen as a figure whose role and abilities are 'perfected' and who deservingly come out on top in every conflict and battle. Numerous *lakon* tell stories about his heroic deeds, and he is known by many different names,

depending on the context of the story. These include Janaka, Parta, Kiriti, Pritaputra, Permadi, Dananjaya, Kumbalwali, Ciptaning Mintaraga, Pandusiwi, Indratanaya, Jahnawi, Palguna, and Margana (Hardjowirogo, 1955).

In the psycho-culture of the Javanese community, Arjuna is not only known as a figure in *Mahabharata* mythology, or a knight in *pakêliran* (the world of shadow puppetry) *wayang purwa*. He has also become a symbol in the real world, the ideal standard of a “real man” in Javanese society, a fighter who cannot be defeated, slim yet sturdy, handsome, even tending towards beautiful, with a will of steel and a gentle heart, extreme in meditation, defender of truth, and loyal to all his family (Anderson, 2008; Mellema, 1954). In some of the stories about Arjuna’s life journey, he also has several weapons given to him by the gods. These include a bow, given to him by the god Indra, the arrow *Pasopati*, from *Sanghyang* [6] Manikmaya, the arrow *Hardhadhadhali* from Kuwera, the arrow *Cundamanik* from Narada, and the arrow *Bramastra* given to him by the God Brahma (Suwandono, 1991).

The creators of *wayang purwa* have developed the legend of Arjuna in such breadth and detail that it even exceeds the way he is portrayed in the *Mahabharata*; even more extreme is that Arjuna is said to be the incarnation (*titisan* [7]) of the God Indra (Ras, 2014). In essence, Javanese creators re-abstract Arjuna as a knight who has many associations with *kahyangan* (the heavens or godly dimension) in order to fulfill the conception of *gung binathara* (a great king incarnated from a god), because it is believed that Arjuna was a forefather on the land of Java, from whom descended great Javanese kings (Mulyono, 1975). The image of Arjuna is truly perfect in Javanese mythology, and on every step of his journey, he is always accompanied by his four faithful companions: Sêmâr, Garèng, Pét-ruk, and Bagong, who together are known as the *punakawan*. An important question follows about the position, role, and potential of these companions because, with all

the perfection he possesses, Arjuna should have the ability to solve every problem he encounters with great ease.

### Wayang Figures of the Punakawan

In the great narrative of ancient Javanese history, the grandeur of kings, princes, and other important figures is represented by their servants (*cantrik*) or personal assistants, who are always present in various different forms of folk performance. The purpose of these dramaturgical ethics in addition to bringing the dramaturgy to life, is to build up the legendary prestige of these main figures. It is not only imaginary figures from the world of mythology who are portrayed in this way; important figures who actually existed in Javanese history are also described as having personal assistants.

Tracing back to the origin of the word *punakawan*, it is known to mean a friend who has a good understanding or can give enlightenment; it may also mean *pa-momong* (guardian) or *dayang* (palace servant), which is the result of an adaptation of the word *Dan-Hyang*, meaning ‘The Honourable’ (Sastromidjojo, 1964). In its essential understanding, *Dan-Hyang* means providing service for magical ceremonies or sacred rituals, and if the word was subsequently adapted to mean palace servant, this can be seen as a form of regulating the belief that a palace is synonymous with the *ratu* or king. According to the concept of old Javanese beliefs, the king was the manifestation of one of the gods, and this concept experienced a transformation in meaning to become ‘for the glory of the king’, as in the conception of *Gung Binathara* (a great king incarnated from a god) (Subagya, 1981).

The appearance of the *punakawan* in the dramaturgy of *pakêliran wayang purwa* has its own special portion in terms of its placement in the order of the scenes, duration, and dramatic atmosphere. These four figures always appear in a scene that serves as an interlude to break up the mounting tension in the story, namely a scene called *gara-gara* [8] (literally: cha-

os). Although the *gara-gara* scenes contain various humorous dialogue and singing, they are nevertheless filled with numerous snippets of advice, in particular from the figure Sêmar (Mellema, 1954), which are cleverly inserted to give the audience a clue that the performance is about to enter into a more intricate scene of conflict that is fraught with tension.

### Sêmar

Sêmar [Figure 2(a)] is not a figure from Hindu (Indian) mythology but belongs purely to works of Javanese culture, and his existence is extremely important in the Javanese *wayang purwa* version of the *Mahabharata* story. He is portrayed as the most respected of all figures, even though he is a commoner (*wong cilik*) who serves as a companion of Arjuna. Sêmar is a form of actualisation of *Sanghyang Ismaya*, who in the dimension of the heavens (*kahyangan*) is one of the sons of *Sanghyang Tunggal*, and his brothers are *Bathara Guru* (*Sanghyang Manikmaya*) and *Togog* (*Sanghyang Antaga*) (Suwandono, 1991). Sêmar's mission in descending to *arcapada* (earth) is to accompany the Pandawa family to uphold truth.

Stories about the figure Sêmar are contained in the ancient manuscript *Gatotkacasraya*, written by Mpu Panuluh in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Mulyono, 1979), but until now, there is no written data about the image of the *punakawan* figures. The earliest image of Sêmar was found carved on a relief at *Sukuh Temple*, in the story of *Sudamala*, which is estimated to have been built in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Haryanto, 1988), but early visualisations of the figures *Garèng*, *Pétruk*, and *Bagong*, which established their images as *pakêm*, or a traditional rule or principle that has continued to exist up to the present day, have not yet been discovered. In Javanese, the word Sêmar means vague, obscure, virtual, mysterious, a source of light, power of the people, and universal light. The basic character that emerges when Sêmar appears in a performance of *wayang purwa* is one that is calming, sensitive, and al-

ways present when conflict reaches a dead end, whose words of advice are solusive and philosophical, and whose magical powers are unmatched by any human, even though he rarely uses them. In the real life of the Javanese community, Sêmar is not believed to be a mythological figure but a mystical figure who guards and protects the land of Java. He is greatly loved and respected, and images of his existence have become new legends. His apparition in a 'supernatural form' that resembles his own characteristics has become a local legend in numerous places.

The background story of Sêmar tells how he goes up against his own brother, *Togog*, in a battle to show off their supernatural powers, where the challenge is to devour a mountain and then spew it back up. *Togog* fails to swallow the mountain and tears his mouth, while Sêmar manages to swallow the mountain but fails to spew it out again, thus making the lower part of his body fat and round (Ismunandar, 1994). This is the visualisation of the basic form of Sêmar in *wayang purwa*, which is truly absurd if viewed as an abstraction of the proportions of a human body, even in the range of stylisation and deconstruction that exists in the unconventional field of Western Modern Aesthetics. His height is only three times the circumference of his head, and anatomically, it is also unclear whether he is portrayed as a male or female figure; his visual form has protruding breasts, but his hair has a tuft at the front, which is characteristic of the hairstyle of Javanese boys in the past. The details of his representation are dominated by angled and conic fields, ranging from the shape of his body to his hair tapering to a point, the ends of his clothes, and even the formation of his fingers, which are always pointing. One special characteristic when Sêmar is portrayed in a stage show is that his right hand always points upwards while he is walking.

### Garèng

*Garèng* or *Nalagarèng* [Figure 2(b)] in the world of Javanese *wayang* is the se-



cond of the *punakawan*. He is regarded as the first son of Sêmar, even though he has actually been adopted. The story *Bathara Ismaya Krama* tells about a holy ascetic by the name of *Resi Sukskadi* who lives in a hermitage (*Padépokan*) called *Bluluktiba*, and has a son, *Bambang Sukskati*, who is meditating on the top of *Candala Mountain*. After finishing his meditation, he asks his father's permission to go down the mountain because he wants to try to attack and defeat all the kings. At the same time, beneath the sea in *Padépokan Kêmbangsoré*, there is an invisible (*gandarwa*) priest by the name of *Bêgawan Salantara*, with a son called *Bambang Pêcruk-pênyukilan*, who is also meditating at the bottom of the sea. After finishing his meditation, he sets off for dry land to put his supernatural powers to the test. On his journey, *Bambang Pêcruk-pênyukilan* meets *Bambang Sukskati*, and they are both as conceited as each other in their desire to test out their supernatural powers. A long battle ensues between the two of them, but neither can defeat the other as their powers are equally strong. As the battle continues, *Sanghyang Ismaya* appears and tries to intervene, but it makes them angry, so they turn on him and attack him instead. *Sanghyang Ismaya's* patience reaches its limits, and he curses them, turning them into the strange, ugly figures of *Garèng* and *Pétruk*. As a consequence, the two of them are adopted by *Sanghyang Ismaya* alias *Sêmar* (Suwandono, 1991).

*Garèng* means dry, or in a some what sick condition, while *Nalagarèng* means a dry heart. In a *wayang* performance, this figure is portrayed as passive, not having much to say (Hardjowirogo, 1955), but responding from time to time to other people's speech with sharp criticism that often leads to a misunderstanding but always ends in humour (Anderson, 2008). The image of *Garèng* in its form as a *wayang purwa* puppet has the smallest and thinnest physique of all the *punakawan*. He is the only *wayang* figure who is visualised with multiple disabilities: he is cross-eyed, with a bulging nose, twisted arms, and a deformed foot, causing him to walk with

a limp. His entire embodiment expresses sorrow, imperfection, bitterness, and a life filled with misfortune.

### Pétruk

*Pétruk* [Figure 2(c)] is the third *punakawan*, or the second son of *Sêmar*, and like *Garèng*, he is also adopted. The chronology of how *Pétruk* came to be adopted by *Sêmar* has been explained in the above description of *Garèng*. Other names of *Pétruk* include *Pêcruk-pêcukilan* (chisel), *Dawala* (long road), *Kanthong bolong* (pocket with a hole), *Dublajaya* (bringing glory), and *Pentung pinanggul* (carrying the baton) (Suwandono, 1991). When *Pétruk* appears in a stage show, he is aggressive, his words are critical and visionary, and he always corrects various problems in a tactical way that also includes a nuance of humour. He has a rather strange gait, taking wide steps with his right arm raised above his head and his index finger pointing forward.

The visualisation of the figure of *Pétruk* in *wayang purwa* is highly controversial in that most of his body parts are portrayed as being too long for the abstraction of the Javanese people. He is the tallest of all the *punakawan*, with long arms, long hair tied back in a ponytail, and a nose that is too long, even by Western standards.

### Bagong

*Bagong* [Figure 2(d)] is the fourth *punakawan*, and the one who most deserves to be called the son of *Sêmar*, even though he is in the last position. In the *Wayang Kulit Purwa* performance entitled *Bagong Gugat*, by *Ki Dhalang Seno Nugroho* (Nugroho, 2019), *Bagong* is shown to be searching for his birth father, who turns out to be none other than *Sêmar* himself. He was born from the effect of *Sêmar's* shadow when he descended from *kahyangan* (the heavens) to *Arcapada* (earth) (Sastromidjojo, 1964; Hardjowirogo, 1955). The dark round field created by *Sêmar's* shadow as he entered the dimension of the real world became manifested in the form of a round figure named *Bagong*. There is truly no end to the



boundaries of fantasy and imagination of creators of Javanese *wayang* in their portrayal of Sêmar's grandeur, and even the effect of the 'energy of his shadow' is able to transform into a human figure.

On the *wayang purwa pakêliran* stage, the *wayang* figure of Bagong is portrayed as a character whose train of thought is not easy to guess; at times, he seems stupid, but at other times, he can be critical and corrective, often behaving in a comic manner but occasionally adhering consistently to his principles. He represents the figure of Arjuna's companion, who is best able to offer both comfort and criticism when dealing with his master's problems.







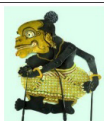

In Javanese, the word Bagong means "moving in circles" (Hardjowirogo, 1955). In the visual form of a *wayang* puppet, he also appears absurd as the abstraction of a human figure, just like Sêmar. His height is not more than two and a half times the circumference of his head, and his body is very fat, but he does not look odd in the sense of a *wayang* puppet that is presenting humour. His other characteristics include round, wide eyes, a large, round head, and his stomach and buttocks are also round.

### Iconography of the Visual Form of Wayang Punakawan

In the understanding of the Javanese community, existential awareness is essentially something that is mysterious but also well-organised, in which life in the world is viewed as a supporting aspect and *wayang* (symbolic shadows) as though it has a higher truth (Mulder, 1994). It is very difficult to find a cultural area with symbols as rich as the Javanese culture, almost as if people live in a world of symbols. Hardly any Javanese art and cultural works are limited to a singular pragmatic function; most also serve as a symbolic medium. Connotative aspects are considered more important, and there is always an effort to observe the symbolic meaning and message, as opposed to the denotative, which is obvious and easy to digest.

The visualisation of Javanese *wayang* is a 'hyper-abstraction'[3] of human

character and qualities, not the representation of a human figure in the form of a puppet, such as is generally the case in puppet performances. *Wayang purwa* is the transformation of heroic stories from the world of mythology, a supra-realistic anthropomorphic representation of heroic qualities. This gives the idea that all the visual forms, performances, backgrounds, behaviour and actions of the puppets are not a guide for us to identify or recognise the character being portrayed, but rather an exploration into the world of symbols to gather meaningful signs in order to formulate an understanding of the qualities and characteristics of the particular figure. Even the unruly gestures (Adema & Kuc, 2019) of certain *wayang* figures can construct a phenomenon of symbols.

Visual Form	Special Features	Interpretation	Iconography	Symbolism
 (a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Body widens towards the base, tapers towards the top.</li> <li>- Some parts form acute angles.</li> <li>- The name Sêmar or Ismaya means obscure or virtual.</li> </ul>	Pyramidal triangle		Sêmar symbol: Power of Spirituality.
 (b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cross-eyed.</li> <li>- Twisted arms.</li> <li>- One hand with deformed fingers.</li> <li>- One deformed leg (walks with a limp).</li> <li>- The name Garèng means dry (imperfect).</li> </ul>	Incomplete form or deformed		Garèng symbol: Awareness of imperfection.
 (c)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very long nose.</li> <li>- Tall body.</li> <li>- Long arms.</li> <li>- Long legs.</li> <li>- Long hair.</li> <li>- Long stride.</li> <li>- The name Pêtruk means road or reach.</li> </ul>	Long reach		Pêtruk symbol: Ability to think far into the future.
 (d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Round eyes.</li> <li>- Hair tied in a round knot.</li> <li>- Round head.</li> <li>- Round body.</li> <li>- The name Bagong means moving in circles.</li> </ul>	Round, wide circle		Bagong symbol: Awareness of accepting and protecting all.

**Figure 2:** Punakawan figures in Javanese Wayang Purwa (1970).

**Source:** Collection from UNS Museum - Universitas Sebelas Maret Indonesia.

When explaining the iconography of the *wayang* figure Sêmar, it is impossible to ignore the connection to the field of metaphysics or even the spirituality of the figure Geertz referred to as the "great low clown" servant and protector of the *Pandawa*. Sêmar is the most important figure in the entire mythology of *wayang purwa* (Geertz, 1973). A side from this dualistic

understanding of Sêmar as both man and God, and whether he actually lived in the real world or only in the world of mythology, the first indication can be referenced from the proportions of his body, which is shaped like a pyramidal triangle. This geometric shape had a special meaning for ancient Javanese society and was always associated with religiosity and spirituality. Examples of this shape are Hindu-Buddhist temples in Central Java, *joglo* roofs on traditional Javanese houses, the *gunungan* [9] or *kayon wayang*, and *sêgo tumpêng* [10] (rice served in the shape of a cone) which is an important and essential item that is always present at traditional ceremonies and magical rituals in the Javanese community.

According to the ancient Javanese beliefs of Animism and Dynamism, mountains were glorified in their existence and regarded as a place where ancestral spirits resided and a space inhabited by magical powers and spiritual dimensions (Sumardjo, 2014). Therefore, the story in which Sêmar and Togog compete against each other to swallow a mountain cannot be isolated from this contextual structure. In principle, this story is not important in terms of its logic, but rather in that Sêmar's body is a 'symbolisation of the mountain', filled with magical powers and spirituality. This is complemented further by the ambiguous anatomy of Sêmar's body, unidentifiable as either male or female, which points to the concept of the 'upper world' in Javanese beliefs, where there is no recognition of gender distinction. Finally, the understanding becomes complete when Sêmar's figure is associated with the meaning of his name, the signs on his clothes, and his existence as *Sanghyang* in *Kahyangan*; even the iconography of the way he walks, with his right hand always pointing upwards, is a symbol of verticality. The substance of Sêmar in relation to the existence of the knight Arjuna is the power of his spirituality.

Patterned by the analysis of the iconography of Sêmar, the visualisation of the *wayang* figure Garèng is also suspected to have symbolic potential. Based on the

visual form of the *wayang*, which is portrayed as a small, thin, cross-eyed figure with multiple deformities, the visual signs are seen to exceed the natural limits of human deformity. In connection with his name, which means 'dry', the message that is being stressed is that his existence is far from perfect and full of suffering. In the context of Garèng in the life journey of the knight Arjuna, Garèng is not a human being but rather a symbol of the conditions that a Javanese knight must possess. In Garèng's case, the symbolisation is that a knight must be conscious of being imperfect so that he does not become arrogant and must also realise he is not the most perfect. In addition, he must be willing to suffer and never give up.

The visual signs of the *wayang* figure Pétruk are easier to digest when using the pattern of analysis applied to the *wayang* figures of Sêmar and Garèng. The depiction of all his body parts as being too long and disproportional, as well as the controversial length of his nose, is the symbolisation of something that is long-lasting or far away in the future. This is clarified further by his name, which means road or reach, and his right arm, which always points forward as he walks; thus, the substance of Pétruk is a symbol of a road or a long reach, in the sense that a knight must be able to think far into the future, be visionary and futuristic.

The *wayang* figure Bagong is easy to recognise because of his round shape, from his eyes to his head, hair knot, posture, and short figure that is no more than two and a half times the circumference of his head. The controversy surrounding this depiction reminds us of the circular shape of Sêmar's shadow when he descended to earth, which was how Bagong came to be born. The circular shape of Bagong's body is not merely to create a comic impression, but is also a symbol of something that moves round in circles, encompasses, and completes. Thus, the existence of Bagong is not as a human but as a form of symbolisation, in the sense that a knight must be sensitive to his surroundings, have the abi-

lity to protect the wider community, and be willing to embrace everyone without discrimination.

### **Ideology of a Javanese Knight**

Javanism provides a general universe of meaning as an integrated body of knowledge that serves to interpret life as it is and as it appears to be (Mulder, 1994). Javanese people view the world not as something abstract but as something concrete (Suseno, 1985), in the sense that it can explain something that is obscure, difficult to explain, even abstract, in a textual-symbolic representation that every layer of the mind can understand. Many symbols have appeared, been developed, and even become mythicised over the centuries, but the clearest and most direct insight is that the values and the minds of the Javanese are always connected to the metaphysical dimension (Geertz, 1973), which is part of the syncretic conception of Javanism (Subagya, 1981; Mulder, 1994). Javanism is not a religion but a philosophy of life with a broad scope, including theology, cosmology, mythology, metaphysics, and anthropology, all of which form the Javanese life views that regulate their sociological thought systems, ethics, and rationality (Mulder, 1994).

The presence of the figure Arjuna in the world of *wayang* far surpasses the boundaries of narration from the original source, the *Mahabharata*. He has come to be viewed as a 'tenet' of Javanese belief and is positioned as an agent of *Kahyangan* who descended to earth on a special mission. His representation is no longer in the image of an ordinary man but rather of a figure who has been perfected with various unique physical and spiritual features so that his performance is 'unmatched' by any. The figure Arjuna is considered a Javanism method for explaining the 'perfect knight' in Javanese cosmology. He has become a "world symbol" for building sociological inspiration, namely that the Javanese people are descendants of a great knight who the gods highly favoured. In this case, it is clear that the translation of

the word *wayang* as "shadow puppet" or "shadow play" is really incorrect, because the shadows in the world of Javanese *wayang* are not the silhouettes created by the light but rather the symbolisation of a reality that it is hoped will transpire.

In essence, the four *punakawan*, or companions of Arjuna, are not really humans, nor are they 'entertaining clowns', but rather symbols of power: 1) Sêmara is a symbol of "spirituality" since a Javanese knight must possess a high level of spirituality, not simply follow his ego and his own will in his actions but always have an awareness of his duties and obligations in the way of God; 2) Garèng is a symbol of "personal awareness", because a knight must have awareness as an imperfect human being, and be ready to accept life's misfortunes so that he does not become arrogant but always continues to learn; 3) Pétruk is the symbol of a "visionary", because a knight must not only be strong in battle but also have the power to think far into the future; and 4) Bagong is a symbol of "holistic awareness", since a knight must also have empathy with the conditions around him, as well as being able to act as a problem solver for his people, and protect those who are weak.

Aside from the limits of genetic truth regarding the origins or line of descent of the great Javanese kings, the mythology about Arjuna is very powerful for awakening the anthropological spirit to build self-confidence in the belief that the Javanese are a superior people because they are descendants of a great knight – a perfect knight who has attained all the following cosmological requirements: 1) power of spirituality in the context of vertical awareness, 2) sense of imperfection in the context of existential awareness, 3) forward-thinking or visionary in the context of temporal awareness, and 4) possessing understanding and being useful for his surroundings, in the context of spatial awareness. Therefore, the *punakawan* are not representations of human beings but ideological symbols of a Javanese Knight, who must attain cosmological perfection

with spiritual power, personal awareness, and an awareness of time and space. These are the characteristics of the “world of Javanese symbols”, not a reference to what exists but rather what it is hoped will transpire.

Many people hold the view that *wayang* (puppets) are the depiction of a body (figure), in a textual mimesis for the purpose of the theatre stage (Purcell-Gates & Fisher, 2017). Mythological belief is the collective faith of a community (Sumardjo, 2014), as in the mythology of *wayang* in the Javanese community, which is not fixated on the limits of right or wrong but instead has risen far beyond the limits of historical logic and empiricism. Art is indeed a source of cognitive education that can cause psychological changes which may or may not be for the better (Young, Winner, & Cordes, 2013), but the mythology of *wayang purwa* was created as the highest level in the cosmological consciousness of the Javanese community. It is not merely an educational source for a particular generation but has become a source of realisation, throughout the entire Javanese civilisation, about how to understand the past, organise the present, and prepare for the future. *Wayang purwa* is a ‘sacred book’ for the Javanese community, which is laid out in an imaginary and philosophical world to reflect problems and inspire solutions in people’s lives.

Hume (as cited in Deleuze & Guattari, 2010) states that causality, association, and integration can inspire opinions and beliefs to recognise and hope for something. The symbols in *wayang purwa* sublimate to become an ‘ethical constant’ in the beliefs of the community, which Harari describes as a way to understand that life is sacred (Harari, 2018). The characterisation of a social figure codified in a silhouette is much farther-reaching than is demonstrated by the name of the figure (Solomonik, 1980). This is true of Arjuna in Javanese *wayang*; he is no longer one of the *Pandawa* brothers who lived in the past, but more than that, he is associated, in ‘transcendental aesthetical’ form (see Kant, 1922), with

the ideology of a knight and ancient Javanese kings.

The ingenuity of *wayang* creators in positioning Arjuna as a symbolic image is perfected in the construct of a system of symbols, in which the four *punakawan* figures, Sêmâr, Garèng, Pétruk, and Bagong, are elements in its completion. The *punakawan* may indeed be interpreted as the representation of human beings, but in the world of Javanese *wayang* they never appear in a context that is not associated with symbols. The visualisation of these four figures surpasses the natural limits in the general depiction of human characteristics. The differences in body shape, expression, meaning of name, behaviour, and mythological background are not mere coincidences but are designed as a symbolisation of all the requirements of perfection that Arjuna must possess. The artworks had fulfilled its Meta-art function as the signages were analysed to show that they were representations of cultural behaviour (Joyce, Leon, & Miguel, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Javanese *wayang* is a world of symbols, a syncretic process between the style of an ancient Javanese worship ritual and local magical performing art tradition combined with a Hindu (Indian) influence, giving rise to a masterpiece by the name of *Wayang Purwa*. There are various overlapping opinions as to why this art form became so great. In principle, the Javanese people are not concerned about the origins or which cultural area contributed more of the basic material, because what is more important is how it was preserved and made great. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* Indian epics, were references in the process of developing *lakon* or stories for *Wayang Purwa*, but Javanese creators managed to develop these into a great narrative that far exceeds the limits of philosophical expression and aesthetic imagination of these two books.

*Wayang Purwa* is the transformation of mythological stories into a stage show



that is filled with symbolic phenomena. The *wayang* is presented as a contemplative medium of symbols in their hyper-realistic portrayal of human figures. Based on interviews with experts and practitioners of puppets, observations of puppet shows, and literature studies on *wayang* and Javanese culture, which were elaborated with the iconography of *punakawan's* visual form, the existence of *punakawan* in understanding Javanese cosmology has symbolic potential. The bodies of Sêmar, Garèng, Pétruk, and Bagong are the iconography of the basic patterns portraying a pyramidal triangular form, an irregular shape, the sign of an arrow, and a circle. In the context of the symbolism of the knight Arjuna, these four figures are not representations of human figures but rather their symbolic potential. Arjuna, as the representation of the ideology of a Javanese knight, is not only accompanied by the four *punakawan* but is subject to the conditions of four kinds of cosmological awareness: spiritual, existential, visionary, and environmental awareness.

## NOTES

A dhalang is an artist skilled in manipulating Javanese wayang in the performance of a lakon (story).

Sunan Muria is one of the nine most important figures who helped spread Islam on the Island of Java, Indonesia, in the 16th century. The nine leaders are known collectively as Walisanga (9 religious leaders, or wali).

Hyper-abstraction is a method of sublimative abstraction of a performance image, the specification of qualities, presentation of supernatural powers, and mythological image of figures in Wayang-Purwa into a puppet's unique and complete visual form.

Drêstarastra, in the Javanese version of the Mahabharata is the son of Dewi Ambika and King Citragada, not King Abiyasa. When Dewi Ambika married King Abiyasa she was the widow of King Citragada, and was already carrying Drêsta-

rastra.

Dèwi Gëndari detests King Pandu because when her younger brother, Sangkuni, lost in a battle against King Pandu, she was taken hostage in the Kingdom of Astina. She hoped to be married to King Pandu himself, but instead she was given to the blind Drêstarastra.

*Sanghyang* is a term used to refer to an existence higher than the gods. Javanese creators reconstructed the Hindu concept by adding another level below God and above the gods.

*Titisan Dewa* refers to a pregnancy that is caused, in part, by the sublimation of energy from one of the gods.

*Gara-gara* is a comedy scene that serves as an interlude before the climax of conflict in a *Wayang Purwa* performance. The main figures in this scene are the *punakawan*, who make jokes and sing to entertain and give advice to Arjuna.

The *wayang gunung* or *kayon* is a *wayang* puppet in the shape of a pyramid with a pointed mountain-like triangle on the top and a picture of *Kalpataru* (tree of hope) (Haryanto, 1988). It represents the concept of cosmological awareness in the Hindu-Javanese belief known as *triloka-tribuana* (three places – three worlds) (Sumardjo, 2014).

Sêgo tumpêng is a dish of rice shaped like a cone and decorated on top with chillies and shallots. It is an important item that must always be present in all traditional Javanese rituals and ceremonies.

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