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Arjuna Visualizations in Three Javanese Wayang

Ratna Cahaya Rina^{a*}, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Jawa Barat 40132, Indonesia

Yasraf A. Piliang^b, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Jawa Barat 40132, Indonesia

Ira Adriati^c, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Jawa Barat 40132, Indonesia

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Abstract

Arjuna, the third Pandava character in Mahabharata story which originated from India, has different characterisation when it spreads and develops in Java, Indonesia. This character is lovely, delicate, loves to dress up, smart in smooth talking, though mentioned as the most masculine character in the story. In the three different Wayang theaters which play the Mahabharata story such as Wayang Kulit (shadow puppet), Wayang Beber (illustrations on scroll-painted fabrics) and Wayang Wong (theatrical performance by humans), there is a distinct pattern to visualise Arjuna masculinity. The purpose of the research is to show how those three Wayangs visualise Arjuna's masculinity. In doing so, we observe the artefact of Arjuna character in Wayang Kulit, Wayang Beber, and costume worn by Arjuna cast in Wayang Wong. The result shows that those three Wayang have a similar strategy to visualise Arjuna, they tend to emphasise on the physical subtlety of Arjuna, the softness of his behaviour and speech. It seems that to convey the masculinity of Arjuna, and there is a consistency to visualise it similar to the characteristic of a woman.

Keywords: Arjuna, visualisation, character, Wayang, Javanese.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Ratna Cahaya Rina**, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Jawa Barat 40132, Indonesia.
E-mail address: ratna.cahaya@umn.ac.id / Tel.:+62 22 2500935

1. Introduction

This paper discusses what we can learn from Arjuna's gender visualisation on three artefacts in different Javanese Wayang (shadow puppet theatre) performances. Arjuna in Javanese Wayang is the most superior character in the Mahabharata story, similar as for the same character in the Mahabharata story originated in India, but the Arjuna version of Java has different gender representations. The premise is, Javanese (one of the tribes who lives in Java Island, Indonesia) have a particular philosophy regarding conveying the superiority of a knight and this is represented through the character Arjuna. There is a pattern that is always the same and appears in every artefact in the Indonesian traditional art (Sumardjo, 2014). These patterns also appear in visual artefacts Arjuna as a way to convey that Arjuna is a superior character for the Java community.

2. Arjuna Knight in Mahabharata Java Version

Arjuna is the third Pandava knight in the Mahabharata story, which is originating from India, but in its spreading, this story has experienced a different development in Java. The essence of the Javanese and Indian Mahabharata stories are essentially the same, revolving around the war between the Pandava (the protagonist) and the Kurawa (antagonist), although there are some differences in storyline and characterisation between the two. In the Indian version of the Mahabharata, Arjuna is described as a brave, mighty, muscular knight, and relies on muscle strength while fighting. Meanwhile, Arjuna in the Javanese version is portrayed as a very handsome, graceful, small-bodied person, and delighted to dress up (Sudjarwo & Sumari, 2010). In other words, the Javanese version of Arjuna is close to female characters. Meanwhile, his character in Indian version is a real male.

The story of Mahabharata in Java is popularly conveyed through Wayang Kulit, a theatrical show featuring the shadow of a character puppet performed by a puppeteer. The puppet is made of buffalo parchment that is carved with the shape of the character's body along with ornaments that complete it. Nevertheless, Javanese uses the term of Wayang for similar forms of performances that bring the Mahabharata story, such as Wayang Wong (stories not brought by puppets, but by humans) and Wayang Beber (Mahabharata stories painted on sheets of paper or cloth and performed by a puppeteer).

As a traditional art, Wayang not only served as a performance in the past, but also as a ritual in traditional ceremonies such as cleaning the village, traditional Javanese ceremony, and so on. However, nowadays Wayang is held as performances and communication media to convey missionary work, disseminate political understanding, socialise new ideas, mobilise the community, et cetera (Sudjarwo & Wasito, 2010). For the Javanese community, Wayang Kulit contains philosophical values of contemplation of the nature of life, origins, and purpose of life, the relationship between man and God, the position of man in the universe and return to the origin (Haryanto, 1991, p. 1). Moreover, Wayang is so important to them that they identify themselves with certain characters and make the Wayang characters an example in their daily actions (Hardjowirogo, 1994).

Arjuna is an important character in Wayang Kulit and known as the most handsome character both physically and mentally. One of the nicknames given to Arjuna is the Lelananging Jagad, Jagoning Dewa (the manliest man in the whole universe - a formidable male who adored by the gods). This nickname implies that the character of Arjuna is a superior knight for Javanese society and a symbol of the quality and toughness of a man. Javanese society refers him as an ideal representation of knight (Woodward & Salim, 1999). The coastal Islamic society even writes the name of Arjuna in their traditional ceremony as a symbol of the perfect human representation, together with the names of the characters in the holy book of the Qur'an (Syam, 2005).

3. Methods

The study of Arjuna visualisation on three Wayang Jawa conducted through observation technique and literature study. Observations were made on Arjuna both in the form of Wayang Kulit, Wayang Wong, and Wayang Beber. Giant and woman characters are also observed to get a complete picture of the visual character of Arjuna. Among of the three Wayang, the data obtained from Wayang kulit is the largest source because it has stronger rules and artefacts that are easier to find than Wayang Wong and Wayang Beber. The data obtained from the observations are analysed by considering theories about Javanese culture and Wayang.

4. Results

Wayang Kulit is the most popular show of all time compared to the other Wayang performances. Nowadays, the Wayang Kulit performances often held around Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Blitar, Ponorogo, Kediri, even outside the Java Island. As an illustration, there are at least ten performances have been held in Semarang, six performances in Sragen and 28 performances in Yogyakarta in November 2016 (Jadwal Pagelaran Wayang Bulan, 2016). Meanwhile, the local government of Surakarta City supports the Wayang Wong performances every Monday to Saturday in Taman Wayang Sriwedari Surakarta. Unfortunately, the Wayang Beber show that tells about Mahabharata has not performed anymore, but some of Wayang artists have produced the Wayang Beber scroll as paintings.

4.1. Arjuna in Wayang Kulit

Wayang Kulit is a puppet theater which is made of buffalo parchment carved hollow and smooth fluted to illustrate the details of the face, clothing, and accessory of the characters. The puppeteer (Dalang) as the storyteller monologues and the show leader who sits behind a wide white screen illuminated by a source of light (electrical bulb or oil lamp) plays the puppets. The audience sees the puppet shadows from the back sides (behind the screen), as result of it, Wayang Kulit also called as the Shadow Theater. However, the spectators often watch the Wayang Kulit from the puppeteer side, so that the audience can see the puppet colours, the puppeteer action, the group of musicians who play the traditional music tool (Nayaga) and the group of singers (Waranggana).

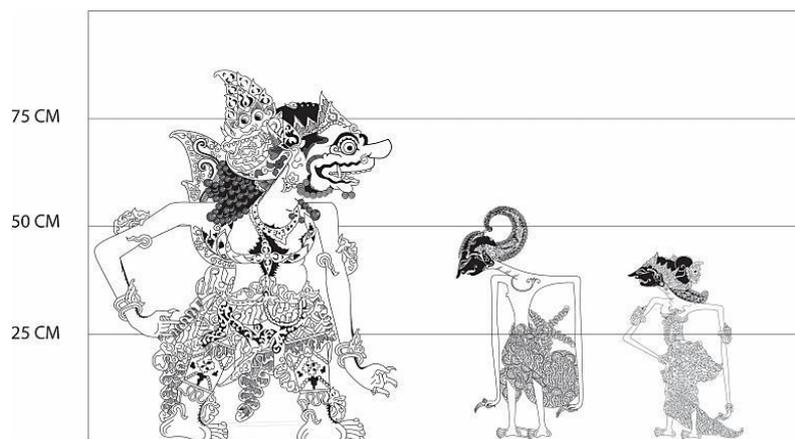


Figure 1. Buto (giants character), Arjuna and Putren (noble woman character)

The Wayang Kulit show uses a complete set of 250–500 full Wayang Kulit characters depending on the size of the show, but only a few characters will be played shown in the right and left edges of the screen, while the rest stored in a box next to the puppeteer. The characters in this Wayang can be distinguished by body size, face detail, and posture of Wayang.

4.1.1. Size and gesture of Wayang Kulit Arjuna

The Wayang puppets grouped into six categories based on the size: Buto (giant), Gagahan, Katongan, Bambang Jangkah, Bambang, and Putren. Buto is a group of giants which are the biggest and fattest characters in the story, about 85–100 cm tall. Most of the characters included in the Buto category are enemies, from Kurawa's side, who have low intelligence, cavalier, rude, greedy and a host of other nasty traits. Gagahan character group measuring about 70 cm, consisting of giant, knight, and god characters. The Javanese word of 'Gagahan' comes from the word 'gagah' which means burly. Because of it, the Gagahan characters are the characters who possess muscle power and moves roughly. The Wayang Katongan group is about 55 cm in size, consisting of a family of kings, knights, and gods who are mostly well-behaved. The Wayang Bambang group consists of two types, namely Bambang Jangkah (having wide foot positions) and Bambang (having a narrow foot position) of slightly smaller size than the Katongan Wayang group (50 cm). Most of this group consists of the knights that behave subtly, but they are very skillful in the war. The last group is Putren which is very small (35 cm) compared to Wayang Buto and Katongan groups. Wayang Putren is the noble female characters who have smooth movements. The Wayang Putren group has a longer hand length than the other Wayang until it is almost parallel to their legs.

Arjuna is in the Bambang group that has subtle gestures like the Katongan and Putren groups. Bambang is a group of knights that have the smallest size when compared with knights in the other Puppet groups (Gagahan, Katongan and Bambang Jangkah). This Bambang group is not too much different from the Puppet which belongs to the Putren group.

4.1.2. Body position of Wayang Kulit Arjuna

There are some differences in Wayang body position that can be seen from the head and legs position. The combination of body position and face detail indicates traits and behaviours of Wayang characters. The position of the head consists of three kinds, namely Langak (with the head tilts upward) which describes of arrogant, hard, strong, brave, and alert traits, Luruh (with the head tilts downward) that is calm, patient, humble, kind, and courtesy traits and Longok (with the head half tilts upward) which is a bit arrogant, tough, agile, and alert traits. There are two kinds of Wayang legs position, namely Jangkah (the legs opened wide) which has a typical body movement hard and rough and Bokongan (the legs slightly closed) that has a smooth body movement.

Arjuna has the downward tilt head and the slightly closed legs position, which shows that he is a very subtle character, both physically (he has smooth gestures) and mind (he has a kind heart). Most of the antagonistic Puppets have the upward tilt head (Langak) and wide open legs position (Jangkahan), as seen on Buto's traits, which are rough, evil, and lacking intelligence. The cleverer antagonist characters have the tilt upward (Langak) or half tilt upward (Longok) head position and the wide open legs position, yet they have a smaller-sized body and belongs to the Katongan group (55 cm). Meanwhile, the protagonist characters have head and legs position as combinations between Langak - Bokongan, Langak - Jangkahan, Luruh - Bokongan, and Luruh - Jangkahan. Only a few characters have a mix of Luruh - Bokongan, namely Arjuna and Puntadewa (the first knight of Pandavas). Thus, these both knights of Bambang have the position of Luruh - Bokongan, same as the position of the figure of Putren group characters.

4.1.3. Face detail of Wayang Kulit Arjuna

The facial details on the Wayang Kulit consists of combinations between eye shape, nose, mouth, and face colour depicting character traits. There are various forms of eye shapes, namely Liyepan (look like rice grains), Kadelen (look like soybeans), Peten (look like bitter bean seeds), Thelengan (perfectly round shape), Plelengan (look like Thelengan but bigger), Kiyer (look like a crescent moon), and Kiyipan which is look like Kiyer but his eyeballs are full round. There are nose Wayang shapes, namely

taper (small nose with the tip position is Longok, Luruh and Langak), blunt (different forms among groups gods, knights, kings, giants, warriors), round (circular, eggplant, flat), nose apes, the human nose, and long nose. Some forms of mouth are Mingkem (closing), Mesem (smile), Gusen (the gum is shown), Mringis (grin), Mrenges (open sideways), Mrongos (open full to one side), Ngablak (wide open), Anjeber (all lips part open wide), Gugut (the bottom somewhat forward). The face colour consists of black, red or pink, white, blue, gold.

Among these types of shapes, there are some common combinations between the face details, position and body size, such as; Thelengan eyes always have blunt-nosed, closed mouth, head position can Luruh, Longok or Langak has a big and tall body. Dondongan eyes always have a blunt nose, mouth Gusen, head position can Luruh, Longok or Langak, and has a rather big body. Tholongan eyes always have a blunt nose, open mouth, Gusen, head position Longok and Langak, big body, and so on (Soekatno, 1992, p. 30).

Arjuna has a combination of Liyepan eyes, taper nose, closed mouth, Luruh head position, has a small and not too tall. Some of the knights belong to this combination group, but most of them have the Langak head position. Pandu and Puntadewa also have the combination of typical Liyepan eyes, as well as most Putren figures such as Sumbadra, Kunti, Larasati, Surtikanti, and so on.

4.2. Arjuna in Wayang Wong

Wayang Wong is a classic Javanese theater show that emerged in the late 18th century, bringing the Mahabharata story, like Wayang Kulit, but played by humans. Elements in Wayang Wong are a narrator, players (dancers), stages setting and gamelan (music played with a set of traditional Javanese music instruments). The visualisation of the characters and costumes of the dancers on Wayang Wong are taken based on the Wayang Kulit. However, the body position and the dancer movement do not adjust to the Wayang Kulit. It takes the basic movement of Javanese dance by standing straight with open leg position with bent knees. The adjustment to the Wayang Kulit is more in the clothing of the dancers, where the male character is bare-chested wearing knee length pants, while the female characters use a long cloth from the chest to the feet.

There are several ways to distinguish between one character to another, namely through movement, makeup, and body size of the player. There are two types of characters in Wayang Wong, namely Wayang Alus and Wayang Gagah. Wayang Alus is the simple characters like some good (not all) knights, Putren, gods, and kings families, while the Gagah characters are gallant warriors, haughty princes, giants, animals, and so on. Wayang Alus performers are beautiful dancers and have a slender body, while dancers who have a big body or stocky will play Wayang Gagah. Wayang Alus has characteristics of gentle, subtle, but agile, followed by a soft voice without inflection. While the movement on Wayang Gagah appears rough, heavy, vigorously, followed by a loud, boisterous and almost histrionic sound (Ludwig, 1976). Wayang Alus makeup is lighter without the use of facial hair, except on some large figures (the protagonist knights in the Katongan group like Bima and Gatutkaca) have a transverse mustache. Wayang Gagah makeup appears thicker, using more red colour, thicker eyebrows, facial hair and sometimes dentures.

Arjuna is characterised as the most handsome knight until almost beautiful like women and has several traits such as women in the Wayang Alus group. Arjuna has a subtle, gentle, yet agile motion when fighting. There is a clear difference between Arjuna and evil characters when performing dance moves to describe the battle. Arjuna moves smoothly but vigorously, while Wayang Gagah who becomes his enemy moves with rough dances, heavy steps, and jumps. Woman dancer often takes the Arjuna role to get a gentler impression in the Arjuna movement. Furthermore, the Arjuna head position always tilts upward in most of scenes both conversation or fight, similar to his head position in Wayang Kulit.

4.3. Arjuna in Wayang Beber

Wayang Beber is the oldest Wayang show from the three Wayang in the study (about 1361 AD), which held for traditional Javanese ceremony. The Wayang images are painted on a sheet of a wide cloth or paper. The Dalang (puppeteer) as storyteller monologues performs the show, accompanied by a group of Nayaga who plays gamelan and warangana who sings in the background as in the Wayang Kulit show. Wayang Beber usually is a smaller performance compared to Wayang Kulit. The pictures on the Wayang are images for famous scenes in the Wayang story, according to the order of the story. The popularity of Wayang Beber that brought the story of Mahabharata (called Wayang Beber Purwa) decreased with the popularity of Wayang Kulit. Currently, Wayang Beber Purwa performance is no longer exist, but some Wayang artist produces the Wayang Beber scroll as paintings. The Wayang Beber performance nowadays brings the story of Panji with the story of Jaka Kembang Kuning (another story about knight which emerged years after Mahabharata).

Arjuna seen in Wayang Beber is more or less the same as that observed on Wayang Kulit, but because it exists in one frame of the scene, Arjuna and the other characters body positions show as if they are moving, so that the foot position does not always look like on Wayang Kulit. Similarly, the Arjuna's body size is supposed to be as big as Puntadewa, but, it looks larger than meant to be. Nevertheless, just like in Wayang Kulit, Arjuna's head position is depicted downward tilt, and Arjuna's position along with other protagonist characters are on the right side of the screen.

5. Discussion

The consistency of similarity between Arjuna and Putren characters in these three Wayang is something paradox, but this thing is important in the Wayang show. Something which locates in the middle of the spectrum like Arjuna's character (he is the third of the five Pandavas and has a male gender but has the characteristics and appearance similar to women) is considered perfect for the Javanese people. The concept of perfection achieved for everything that is in the middle (paradox) like this is not only applicable among the Javanese, but also the tradition society throughout the archipelago.

This kind of paradox arises from opposition pairs between two opposing elements. Such opposition pairs also appear in Western philosophy, as Pythagoras had put it in the sixth century. He created a table of ten opposing categories (Table 1), such as finite/unlimited, odd/even, one/lot, right/left, male/female, still/moving, straight/curvature, bright/dark, good/bad, box/longitude (Lloyd, 1984, p. 3). Referring to the table, Llyod (1984, p. 3) argues that men and women are treated equally with other contrast categories, as something good (male) and bad (females). The father (male) actively performs sexual reproduction, and the mother (female) passively becomes a reservoir of this activity. This concept becomes the basis of male superiority which is inseparable from masculine traits, so masculinity and men are in the highest hierarchy, while women with their femininity are in the lowest hierarchy.

Table 1. Demographic information of sample

Pythagoras		Indonesian traditional society	
Form	Formless	Male	Female
Odd	Even	Open	Close
One	Many	Dry	Wet
Right	Left	Consumption	Storage
Male	Female	Content	Contain
Rest	Motion	Stiff	Round
Straight	Curved	Solid	Hollow
Light	Dark	Bright	Dark
Squared	Oblong		
Good	Bad		

Sumber: Lloyd (1984, p. 3) and dan Sumardjo (2006, p. 53)

In contrast to the Greek philosophical thought, the opposition pairs in the Javanese society are interdependent to each other (Sumardjo, 2014, p. 23). The sky needs the earth; the dark needs the light, the sun needs the moon, and so on. This concept is also used to explain the oppositional relationship between men and women. Man exists because of the male (female) and female (heavenly) couple, which symbolises the world, signifies the universe, signifies the God (who is independent). Further, Sumardjo (2014, p. 23) explains that the paradoxical identity is the culmination of truth because it has the value of singularity, namely the independence of duality (the opposition pair).

The concept that underlies Arjuna's perfection as the genuine male knight who possesses female (non-visual) qualities such as his subtle way to speak (in a low voice typical of a male voice), his gentle gestures and his enjoyment to dress up. These non-visual properties are visualised with his very handsome face, his small and slim body, his downward tilt head position, and his slightly closed leg position. Arjuna's characterisation lies among Kurawa's antagonist male characters (large body, head-to-head position, wide-open detail and wide-open legs) and Putren characters (smallish, crooked head position, small facial details, and Closed legs) as shown in Table 2. Most of the protagonist knights in the Javanese version of the Mahabharata are depicted small and have a closer resemblance to the Putren character. It is precise that the similarities of visual and non-visual of Arjuna that makes him as an unbeatable character and a perfect male figure for the Javanese. Thus he called as the Lelananging Jagad (the most male of the male in the whole universe).

Table 2. Visual elements of Buto (giant characters group), Arjuna and Putren (noble women characters group)

Groups	Wayang Kulit			Wayang Wong			Wayang Beber		
	Buto	Arjuna	Putren	Buto	Arjuna	Putren	Buto	Arjuna	Putren
Size	80–100 cm	50 cm	35 cm	Stout/Fat	Slim	Slim	Large	Small	Small
Eyes	Tholongan, Dondongan	Liyepan	Liyepan	-	-	-	Tholongan, Dondongan	Liyepan	Liyepan
Nose	Blunt	Taper	Taper	-	-	-	Blunt	Taper	Taper
Mouth	Slightly opened, the gum is shown and has fangs	Closed	Closed	Wearing dentures	Normal	Normal	Slightly opened, the gum is shown and has fangs	Closed	Closed
Head position	Tilted upward	Tilted downward	Tilted downward	Tilted upward	Tilted downward	Tilted downward	Tilted upward	Tilted downward	Tilted downward
Legs position	Wide open	Slightly open	Slightly open	Wide open	Wide open	Narrow	Not always clearly depicted	Not always clearly depicted	Not always clearly depicted
Artificial hair	Big moustache, sideburns, chest hair	None	None	Big moustache, sideburns, chest hair	None	None	Big moustache, sideburns, chest hair	None	None

Modern architectural products reflect the cultural values, lifestyles, social and economic levels of the period in which they were built. These buildings, which are obliged to provide cultural continuity with the traces they carry and which are described as the heritage of modern architecture; contribute to the formation of the character and identity of the city they are located in because they carry traces of a certain period. For this reason, these buildings determined as modern architectural heritage should be evaluated within the scope of conservation.

Cities constitute the memory of the city and the feeling of belonging to the city, with the identities of the buildings/environments that are the witnesses of the changes they have experienced in the historical process. The products of the modern architectural heritage of the 20th century should also be conserved and kept alive because they constitute a part of city's memory.

6. Conclusion

The middle position between the spectrum of an oppositional pair is necessary for the Javanese society since it carries the properties of the two oppositions then forms something new that is different from its origin. This autonomy is the singularity trait of God, where it is perfect so that the Javanese thinking that this autonomy is a sign of perfection. Based on this concept, everything that is in the middle is perfect, like Arjuna who becomes a perfect character because he has male and female characteristics, yet it must still be indistinguishable that he is male, although as a man he is more like a woman.

Arjuna in the Wayang Kulit and Wayang Beber (though using different media and storytelling, but both have similar visualisations), Arjuna's body appears larger than female characters, while in Wayang orang this could not be fulfilled, especially if Arjuna played by a female dancer. The wide legs position of Arjuna can also be a differentiator in Wayang Wong, while on the contrary, the position of the legs in Wayang Kulit and Wayang Beber should become something that makes it similar to the female character. The other things that can use to distinguish between Arjuna and female characters in the three different Wayang are by looking at their clothes and accessories. While in the case of Arjuna's face, both inlay (in Wayang Kulit), makeup (in Wayang Wong), and painting (in Wayang Beber) are made similar to female characters.

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