

The Aesthetics of Musical Integration in Wayang Kulit Purwa Performance

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
Music is a decisive structural element of theatrical performance, yet the mechanism by which musical structure and dramatic form become integrated remains under-theorised, particularly in traditions where music organises rather than merely accompanies the action. Indonesian <i>pedalangan</i> scholarship has developed a sophisticated emic vocabulary for this integration, while international ethnomusicology has documented Javanese gamelan from without; the two bodies of work have rarely been read together. This article examines the aesthetic composition of <i>karawitan pakeliran</i> in <i>wayang kulit purwa</i> performance, asking how melodic patterns and formal <i>gending</i> structures interact with narrative meaning to shape a unified performance. The study is conceptual and library-based, working from a corpus of Indonesian-language <i>pedalangan</i> and <i>karawitan</i> scholarship published between 1960 and 2023, English-language ethnomusicological and anthropological studies of Java, and documented performance material for a single <i>lakon</i>, <i>Irawan Rabi</i>, read through a standardised Javanese <i>gending</i> compendium alongside its published English translation. The analysis follows an emic–etic procedure in which Javanese categories — <i>sanggit</i>, <i>garap</i>, <i>mungkus</i>, <i>nglambari</i>, and <i>nyawiji</i> — are first described in their own terms and only then read against general aesthetic theory. The findings show that the aesthetic function of <i>gending</i> operates on three levels: framing the dramatic action, reinforcing its mood, and merging with the unfolding narrative; that these functions are institutionalised in training repertoire rather than merely descriptive of it; and that tonal choice carries cosmological as well as dramatic weight. The article contributes an integrated account in which music, narrative, ethics, and cosmology converge.	garap gending pakeliran Javanese cosmology pathet Sanggit  This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

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INTRODUCTION

Music and theatre are commonly regarded as inseparable components of performance. Theatre, in its broadest sense, encompasses every form of performing art staged before an audience, and music — as one of its most decisive structural elements — is rarely, if ever, absent from theatrical presentation. The performing arts of Indonesia span a wide range of forms, from modern genres such as drama and film to traditional theatre including *wayang wong*, *wayang kulit*, *ketoprak*, *ludruk*, and *lenong*, all of which have had to negotiate their place within an increasingly globalised cultural economy (Soedarsono, 2002). Within this spectrum, *wayang kulit purwa* — the shadow-puppet theatre of Central Java performed by a *dalang* (puppeteer) through the night, with a *gamelan* ensemble and its singers seated behind him — stands out for the extent to which its narrative structure is bound to musical structure.

Nearly every element of a *wayang* performance is tied to a corresponding musical structure, one that reflects a system of local, culturally embedded knowledge (Ahimsa-Putra, 2003). Such culturally specific knowledge is commonly described as *emic*: knowledge whose meaning and terminology belong distinctly to the community that produces and sustains it. Within the tradition of Javanese *pedalangan* (the art and practice of puppeteering), this *emic* knowledge is organised around the paired concepts of *sanggit* and *garap* — *sanggit* referring to a *dalang*'s individual creative interpretation of a *lakon* (story), and *garap* to the collaborative process through which that interpretation is realised in performance together with the *karawitan* (gamelan) ensemble. *Garap*, in particular, has been theorised at length as the central analytical concept of Javanese musical practice, naming not a fixed object but the whole system of interpretive decisions by which a skeletal composition is brought to sounding life (Supanggah, 2009). A comparable emphasis on the puppeteer's interpretive agency appears in Sedana's (2002) study of the neighbouring Balinese *wayang* tradition, which, while a distinct performance culture, documents a structurally similar reliance on creative latitude within a fixed narrative and musical framework.

Music in *wayang* performance is never merely a general accompaniment to the spectacle as a whole; it is bound to specific dramatic elements — character (*tokoh*), dialogue (*antawecana*), narration (*janturan* and *pocapan*), the *dalang*'s sung narration (*sulukan*), and gamelan compositions (*gending*) — as well as to the emotional atmosphere of each scene. This close interweaving between musical structure and narrative content does more than reinforce the coherence of the storyline; it shapes the aesthetic character of the performance as a whole and grants the *dalang* considerable latitude for interpretation and creative development.

Previous scholarship on this relationship falls broadly into three bodies of work that have rarely been read together. The first is Indonesian *pedalangan* and *karawitan* scholarship. Soetarno et al. (2007) proposed an influential formulation of the aesthetic functions of *gending* in *pakeliran*, distinguishing three principal roles — *mungkus* ('framing'), *nglambari* ('reinforcing' or 'illustrating'), and *nyawiji* ('merging' or 'unifying'). Sunardi (2013) developed a parallel account organised around the twin criteria of *nuksma* (the animating force of a performance) and *mungguh* (its propriety or fittingness), and Nugroho and Aji (2021) have since applied that framework to the *karawitan* of an experimental *pakeliran sandosa* production. Hastanto (2009) supplied the standard theorisation of *pathet*, the modal system that governs which *gending* may be used at which point of the night, while Sumarsam (2003) has examined the structural and cultural dimensions of Javanese gamelan and Sumukti (2005) the symbolic and cosmological associations carried by particular tones. Junaidi and Sugiarto (2018) took the further step of testing the three-function framework against the pairing of specific puppets with specific *gending*, and Gie (2004) offers a complementary aesthetic framework, grounded in Beardsley's principles of unity, complexity, and intensity, for understanding the formal coherence of artistic works.

The second body of work is international ethnomusicological and anthropological scholarship, which has independently documented Javanese gamelan and *wayang* from without. Becker (1980) and Becker and Feinstein (1984) examined the theoretical structure of gamelan melody in detail, and Perlman (2004) analysed how Javanese musicians themselves theorise the relation between a skeletal melody and its elaboration. Geertz (1960) and Koentjaraningrat (1984) situated Javanese performance within its wider religious and cultural system; Magnis-Suseno (1997) offered a systematic account of Javanese ethics; and Clara van Groenendael (1985), Keeler (1987), and Brandon (1970) documented the social role of the *dalang* and, in Brandon's case, produced annotated English translations of standard *lakon* texts. A third and more recent body of work has turned to change and adaptation: Soetarno (2011) traced shifts in Javanese *pedalangan* style, Sudarko (2016) compared the scene structures of the Surakarta and Yogyakarta traditions, Sumarsam (2013) documented the hybridisation of Javanese gamelan under Western influence, and Sularso et al. (2023) proposed a socio-karawitanological paradigm for reading gamelan's cultural effects. Alongside these, semiotic and symbolic readings of *wayang* have continued to develop (Hidajat, 2009; Subiyantoro et al., 2020).

What remains comparatively underexplored is how these bodies of scholarship – the emic-aesthetic categories developed from within the *pedalangan* tradition, the etic documentation produced largely outside it, and the general philosophical aesthetics that both implicitly invoke – might be read together, and how the resulting synthesis bears on a specific, culturally embedded question: how a musical choice as particular as a change of *pathet* can simultaneously serve a dramatic function and carry deeper ethical and cosmological significance. The gap, in other words, is not an absence of publications on *gending pakeliran* but the absence of a reading that holds the three registers together; the three-function framework in particular is repeatedly invoked as settled theory without being tested against a named, documented performance text. This article is the first to read the *mungkus–nglambari–nyawiji* framework against a single documented *lakon* that exists in both a standardised Javanese *gending* compendium and a published scholarly English translation, and to relate the resulting account to the ethical and cosmological order within which Javanese musicians and puppeteers situate tonal choice.

This article accordingly examines the aesthetic concept of music within *wayang kulit purwa* performance, with particular attention to how the compositional structure of *karawitan pakeliran* interacts with narrative and cultural meaning to shape the overall aesthetic experience of the performance. Three questions organise the enquiry: how the compositional materials of *karawitan pakeliran* are built up and what dramatic functions they serve; how those functions are realised in a specific documented *lakon*; and what ethical and cosmological commitments give particular tonal and formal choices their significance within the tradition. The contribution offered here is conceptual and interpretive rather than ethnographic: it synthesises an established but dispersed body of scholarship and grounds that synthesis in documented performance material, rather than reporting new fieldwork.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative, library-based interpretive design (*kajian pustaka*), an approach suited to conceptual and aesthetic enquiry into an established performance tradition whose primary sources are textual, notational, and codified rather than dispersed across living informants alone. The design was chosen because the research question concerns the relation between categories – between an emic aesthetic vocabulary and the general aesthetic theory it can be read against – and because the tradition in question has produced, over more than six decades, a substantial written record of its own compositional norms. The theoretical

framework is threefold and was brought to bear at successive points in the analysis: the *pedalangan* aesthetics of Soetarno et al. (2007), supplemented by Sunardi's (2013) *nuksma* and *mungguh* and Supanggah's (2009) theory of *garap*, was used to describe compositional function; Beardsley's principles of unity, complexity, and intensity, as mediated by Gie (2004), were used to test the coherence of the resulting account; and Gadamer's argument concerning art and truth, as mediated by Palmer (2005), was introduced only at the final interpretive stage, where the question of what a performance discloses rather than how it is built came into view.

Corpus, Period, and Selection Criteria

The corpus surveyed comprises three categories of source, assembled between March and October 2023. The first is Indonesian-language scholarship on *pedalangan* and *karawitan* aesthetics published between 1960 and 2023, including standard theoretical formulations (Soetarno et al., 2007; Sunardi, 2013), technical and historical studies of gamelan composition (Hastanto, 2009; Sumarsam, 2003; Supanggah, 2009), studies of stylistic change (Soetarno, 2004, 2011; Sudarko, 2016), and Javanese cultural-philosophical scholarship (Ahimsa-Putra, 2003, 2013; Gie, 2004; Sumukti, 2005). The second is English-language ethnomusicological and anthropological scholarship on Java, drawn on both for independent corroboration of claims made in the Indonesian-language literature and for comparative theoretical perspective (Becker, 1980; Becker & Feinstein, 1984; Clara van Groenendael, 1985; Geertz, 1960; Keeler, 1987; Koentjaraningrat, 1984; Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Perlman, 2004; Sumarsam, 1995, 2013). The third is documented performance material for a single *lakon*, *Irawan Rabi*, comprising a standardised Javanese compendium of its *gending* usage (Nojowirongko, 1960) and a published scholarly English translation of the play text (Brandon, 1970), used together as an illustrative case.

Sources were included where they engage directly with the aesthetics, structure, or social context of *wayang kulit* or *karawitan*, and where they either hold recognised standing within Indonesian *pedalangan* scholarship – indicated by publication through an arts-institute press or an accredited national journal, or by sustained citation within that literature – or represent widely cited contributions to international ethnomusicology and Southeast Asian studies. Works on *wayang* in neighbouring traditions were admitted only where they bear on the puppeteer's interpretive latitude (Sedana, 2002). General aesthetic theory was included only where it offers a clear point of contact with the emic categories under discussion, following the precedent of Gie (2004) and Palmer (2005) as intermediary readings of Beardsley and Gadamer respectively. Studies of *wayang* concerned solely with pedagogy, media adaptation, or audience reception were excluded, as were popular and unattributed online accounts. The single *lakon* selected for grounded illustration was chosen on one criterion: that it exist in both a codified Javanese *gending* compendium and a full published English translation, a condition satisfied within the *wayang kulit purwa* repertoire by very few plays.

Data Collection

Three collection techniques were used. Systematic reading of the written corpus produced a set of analytical notes organised by aesthetic category rather than by author, recording for each category its definition, the examples used to illustrate it, and the claims made on its behalf. Score and repertoire analysis of Nojowirongko's (1960) compendium produced an inventory of the *gending* prescribed for each stage of *Irawan Rabi*, together with their formal type and *pathet*. Comparative reading of Brandon's (1970) translation produced a scene-by-scene account of the same play's dramatic structure, recorded independently of the musical inventory so that the two could afterwards be set side by side. The author's own practitioner knowledge as a performing *dalang* was used as a fourth source, but was recorded separately from the documentary material and is marked as such wherever it appears in the analysis.

Data Validation and Analysis

Credibility was established by source triangulation and by a deliberate separation of emic and etic materials. Every substantive claim drawn from the Indonesian-language literature was checked against at least one independent source, and where possible against a source from a different scholarly tradition: the account of *cengkok*-based melodic construction, for instance, was verified against Becker (1980), Becker and Feinstein (1984), and Perlman (2004), and the claim of a stylistic shift in *wayang* accompaniment was checked against Sumarsam (2013), Soetarno (2004, 2011), and Sudarko (2016) before being retained. Claims that could be traced to only one source, or that rest on the author's practitioner knowledge, are identified as such in the text rather than presented as established findings.

The analysis then followed a combined emic–etic procedure of the kind long used in Javanese cultural anthropology (Ahimsa-Putra, 2003, 2013; Koentjaraningrat, 1984), in four steps. First, each aesthetic category was described in its own terms, drawing only on the Indonesian-language sources in which it originates. Second, the category was tested for internal consistency against other emic categories, so that *mungkus*, *nglambari*, and *nyawiji* were read against *garap* and *pathet* before any external theory was introduced. Third, the category was read against etic comparative material – general aesthetic theory and international scholarship on Java – and retained in that reading only where the etic material illuminated rather than overrode the emic account; a reading was rejected where it required the Javanese term to mean something no Javanese source attributes to it. Fourth, the resulting account was tested against the case material: the *gending* usage documented by Nojowirongko (1960) was read descriptively first, then set against the dramatic structure of the play as rendered in Brandon's (1970) translation, and the framework was judged to be supported only where the two independently compiled records corresponded.

Research Ethics and Positionality

The study involved no human participants, no fieldwork in ritual or restricted settings, and no collection of personal data, and therefore required no institutional ethical approval; all materials analysed are published works held in institutional libraries. Two matters of positionality are declared. First, the author is a practising *dalang* trained in the Yogyakarta tradition as well as an academic researcher of *pedalangan*; the technical observations concerning *suluk* reported in the discussion derive from that practice and are identified in the text at the point where they occur, rather than being presented as documentary findings. Second, the author has published earlier work on *pedalangan* aesthetics (Kasidi, 2004, 2011, 2017) that is cited here; those citations are restricted to points where the earlier work is the specific source of a claim, and are marked so that readers can weigh them accordingly. Javanese terms are given in the orthography used in the sources cited, with English glosses at first mention.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Compositional Materials of Karawitan Pakeliran

Within *wayang* performance, the relationship between *karawitan* (gamelan music) and *pakeliran* (puppetry) is so close that the two are rarely discussed separately. At the heart of this relationship lies the concept of composition: the arrangement of a melody's basic elements into a structure of harmonious tones capable of producing a sense of beauty and pleasure in the listener. The foundation of composition in *pakeliran* accompaniment originates in the melodic patterns of the *saron* instruments, known as *ricikan* (Sumarsam, 2003, pp. 232–240). Such patterns are also referred to, in different contexts, as *formula*, *gatra*, or *cengkok*. These melodic forms range from the relatively simple to the highly intricate, developing from basic structures such as *lancaran* into more elaborate forms such as *ladrang*, *ketawang*, and *gending*.

This account is independently corroborated in the ethnomusicological literature, and the corroboration matters because it establishes that the description is not an artefact of the *pedalangan* tradition's own vocabulary. Becker's (1980) and Becker and Feinstein's (1984) documentation of Central Javanese *karawitan* describes the same underlying *cengkok*-based melodic system from outside that tradition, while Perlman (2004) examines in detail how Javanese musicians themselves theorise the relationship between a *gending*'s skeletal melody (*balungan*) and its more elaborate realisation. Perlman's finding is worth pausing on: he shows that Javanese musicians hold competing implicit theories of the melody that lies behind the *balungan*, which qualifies any account — including the one offered here — that treats the relation between *ricikan* pattern and *gending* as a single, agreed structure. What the present study adds is that in *pakeliran* this indeterminacy is not a problem to be resolved but a resource: it is precisely the latitude within the skeletal melody that allows a *gending* to be re-weighted towards the dramatic requirements of a given scene, which is the substance of what Supangguh (2009) theorises as *garap*.

The basic melodic principle is elaborated differently across each of the gamelan's *ricikan* — roughly ten to thirteen instruments, each played according to its own technique even when performing the same *gending*. It is precisely this diversity of playing technique that produces the rich, resonant, and rhythmically layered sound characteristic of gamelan music, and it is here that Beardsley's criterion of complexity — the diversity of structural elements that gives a work its richness (Gie, 2004) — finds an unusually literal instantiation. In performance practice, additional supporting elements, such as sung poetic texts (*tembang*), are sometimes incorporated to further strengthen the aesthetic effect.

For the specific purposes of *wayang* performance, further elements are added in consideration of the composition's dramatic function, giving the music a distinct aesthetic character in comparison to a purely orchestral gamelan presentation. The dramatic requirements of a given scene — whether sorrow, joy, anger, romance, conflict, or battle — are a primary consideration in shaping its accompaniment. This has given rise to compositions created specifically for *wayang* accompaniment, marked by particular sonic emphases such as the *keprakan* strike, the sound of the *cempala* (the *dalang*'s wooden mallet), and other distinctive gamelan effects. These elements are not ornamental. They are the means by which the *dalang* asserts control over musical time, and they mark the point at which gamelan composition ceases to be autonomous and becomes theatrical.

The Threefold Aesthetic Function of Gending

Soetarno et al. (2007, pp. 137–141) offer the most influential aesthetic formulation for *wayang* accompaniment, identifying three principal functions of *gending* in *pakeliran*: *mungkus* ('to frame,' 'to contain,' or 'to bound' the dramatic action), *nglambari* ('to reinforce,' 'to illustrate,' or 'to emphasise' a scene's mood), and *nyawiji* ('to merge' or 'to become one' with the unfolding narrative). This formulation is grounded in the practical playing patterns of *karawitan* composition, though audiences do not always find it straightforward to distinguish which type of accompaniment corresponds to a given moment in the performance.

The framework has been applied productively but has also been subject to qualification, and both matter for the reading advanced here. Junaidi and Sugiarto (2018) used precisely these three functions to explain why particular puppets are paired with particular *gending*, and found that the pairing follows from the puppet's visual form and characterological type rather than from the scene alone — a result that extends the framework from the level of the scene to the level of the individual figure. Sunardi (2013), by contrast, organises *pakeliran* aesthetics around *nuksma* and *mungguh* rather than around functional categories, and Nugroho and Aji (2021), applying that alternative framework to the *karawitan* of an experimental *pakeliran sandosa*, conclude that aesthetic achievement is a matter of accuracy, harmony, and fittingness

between musical composition and the inner atmosphere of the play. The two frameworks are not rivals so much as differently pitched: Soetarno et al. describe what a *gending* does, while Sunardi describes how well it does it. Reading together, they suggest that the threefold functions are best understood as the available modes of relation between music and drama, and *nuksma* and *mungguh* as the criteria by which a particular realisation of one of those modes is judged successful. The present study adopts the functional framework as its analytical instrument for that reason, while treating fittingness as the standard against which each function is assessed.

A Grounded Illustration: Gending and Narrative in the Lakon Irawan Rabi

The *mungkus–nglambari–nyawiji* framework is not merely a theoretical abstraction; it is embedded in the institutional practice of *pedalangan* itself. A clear illustration is available in the *lakon Irawan Rabi* ('Irawan's Wedding'), which is unusual in having generated two complementary documents that, read together, allow the framework to be examined against a specific, named performance text rather than in the abstract. The first is Nojowirongko's (1960) *Serat Tuntunan Pedalangan Tjaking Pakeliran Lampahan Irawan Rabi*, a Javanese-language compendium that standardises the *gending* appropriate to each stage of this particular *lakon* for *dalang* training in the Surakarta style. The second is Brandon's (1970) *On Thrones of Gold*, an annotated English scholarly translation that includes *Irawan's Wedding* as one of only three plays selected to represent the *wayang kulit purwa* repertoire to English-language readers, alongside a substantial introduction describing the play's musical and performance conventions.

That a single *lakon* should have generated both a dedicated technical compendium of its musical treatment and one of the first full scholarly translations of a *wayang* play into English is itself significant. It indicates the degree to which a specific narrative and its accompanying *gending* are treated, within the tradition, as a fixed and consequential pairing rather than an interchangeable combination of story and background music. Reviewed at the level of dramatic structure, *Irawan Rabi* is, as its English title indicates, a courtship and wedding narrative, moving through the formal opening audience (*jejer*), scenes of family negotiation, comic interlude, obstacle, and eventual celebratory resolution. The play's arc corresponds closely to the three-part aesthetic function identified by Soetarno et al. (2007). Early negotiation and introductory scenes require *gending* that *mungkus*, framing and containing the unfolding courtship within a recognisable dramatic shape; scenes of comic interlude or rising tension call for *gending* that *nglambari*, reinforcing and colouring the emotional register of each episode; and the culminating wedding scene calls for a musical treatment that *nyawiji*, merging fully with the narrative's emotional resolution rather than merely accompanying it.

Two features of the compendium deserve particular emphasis, because they bear directly on what kind of claim the framework can support. The first is that Nojowirongko (1960) prescribes *gending* by *pathet*, and that the sequence of *pathet* across the night — *nem*, *sanga*, *manyura* — is not negotiable, which means that the choice available to a *dalang* at any given moment is a constrained one, exercised within a modal territory fixed in advance (Hastanto, 2009). The threefold functions therefore operate inside a structure that has already narrowed the options; they describe how a *dalang* moves within a frame, not how the frame is chosen. The second is that the compendium exists for training. Its purpose is to be taught from, which means that the correspondence between narrative moment and musical treatment was stable enough, at the point of codification, to be transmitted as instruction rather than negotiated anew in each performance.

This finding qualifies the framework's status in a way that the existing literature has not made explicit. Soetarno et al. (2007) present the three functions as an analytical description of *pakeliran* practice; the evidence of the compendium suggests that they are better understood

as a retrospective articulation of a pedagogical norm that was already operative in codified form some four decades earlier. That is a stronger claim than the one usually made on the framework's behalf, and it also explains why Junaidi and Sugiarto (2018) were able to apply the framework at the granular level of puppet-to-*gending* pairing with such consistency: the consistency they found is an artefact of standardisation, not merely of analytical fit. It should be said plainly that a complete scene-by-scene correlation between Nojowirongko's (1960) prescribed *gending* and Brandon's (1970) translated dialogue would require close comparative philological work beyond the scope of the present study, and is noted here as a direction for further research. Even at the level of overall dramatic structure, however, the pairing of these two independently produced documents demonstrates that the aesthetic framework developed in Indonesian *pedalangan* scholarship corresponds to an institutionalised compositional practice – standardised closely enough to be codified, taught, and, in Brandon's case, translated as a coherent artistic whole.

Audience Aesthetic Experience and the Principle of Unity

For most audiences, appreciating a performance – whether *wayang*, theatre, dance, or gamelan orchestra – does not require this degree of technical awareness. Audiences typically surrender themselves fully to what is presented, entering what is, for them, an autonomous artistic world that offers an experience and a quality that may be entirely new. The challenge for audiences arises only when they attempt to articulate that experience – what aspects accompany the presence of a work of art, and what theoretical framework might properly explain it. This is precisely what is meant by aesthetic experience: an individual's engagement with, and interpretation of, the aesthetic concepts embodied in a work of art.

Every work of art forms an orderly whole composed of interrelated parts, each supporting and building toward a single overarching purpose; no part exists as an isolated fragment, and each contributes meaningfully to the completeness of the whole. This mode of thinking underlies the organisation of the various functions and roles played by the elements that constitute a work of art – what is often called organic unity (Gie, 2004, p. 24). On this basis, the aesthetician Monroe Beardsley identifies three defining elements of an aesthetic work: unity, meaning that a work is structured according to the principles proper to its art form and possesses a complete, well-integrated form, in which the constituent elements relate to one another functionally to produce a coherent whole; complexity, referring to the diversity of structural elements that gives a work its richness and distinctive appeal; and intensity, meaning that a genuinely aesthetic work possesses a distinguishing quality that sets it apart from other works.

Setting this against the emic framework produces a result worth stating precisely, because it marks the limit of what the comparison can deliver. The three Javanese functions and the three Beardsleyan criteria are not equivalent, and mapping one onto the other would be a category error: *mungkus*, *nglambari*, and *nyawiji* name relations between two media, whereas unity, complexity, and intensity name properties of a single work. What the comparison does show is that *nyawiji* – the merging of music with narrative such that the two cease to be separable – is the emic tradition's own name for the condition that Beardsley calls unity, arrived at independently and from the opposite direction. Where Beardsley reasons from the finished work back to the properties that make it coherent, the *pedalangan* tradition reasons forward from the *dalang*'s and musicians' choices to the condition those choices are meant to produce. That convergence lends the emic category a certain theoretical standing without requiring it to be translated out of its own vocabulary, which is what the emic-etic procedure set out in the method was designed to protect.

Wayang as a Complete and Ethically Grounded Art Form

Wayang performance as a whole may be classified as an art form that foregrounds human ethics and morality, situating it among art forms rich in aesthetic value. For centuries, the

world of *wayang* has demonstrated the presence of moral values central to Javanese life. More than this, *wayang* performance is arguably the most complete of Indonesia's traditional art forms, encompassing multiple artistic disciplines at once. As discussed more precisely below in relation to Haryanto's (1988) typology, this range extends across carving and craft, bodily movement, dramatic art, vocal art, music, visual art, literature, and rhetoric — a breadth of disciplines that few other traditional Indonesian art forms combine within a single performance event.

The ethical and aesthetic dimension of *wayang kulit purwa* performance is rooted in the cultural behaviour of a particular community, on the premise that every culture differs from others without any one culture being inherently superior — a premise developed at length in Magnis-Suseno's (1997) systematic account of Javanese ethics and consistent with Koentjaraningrat's (1984) broader description of Javanese cultural classification. Customs vary across communities, and this variation is simply a fact of social life. What is considered proper in a given community depends on that community's own cultural framework, such that other cultures are inevitably assessed in relation to the norms of one's own. The 'right path,' in this view, is the path taken by one's ancestors and handed down across generations, such that tradition itself becomes its own justification.

The term *tapa brata*, which recurs throughout many *wayang* narratives, refers to a form of Javanese inner discipline still practised by segments of Javanese society; the presence of such narratives in the *wayang* repertoire reflects an ongoing effort of *ngleluri* or *nguri-uri* — preserving what is good within Javanese culture. *Tapa brata* is a concept of inner conduct: *tapa*, from the Sanskrit *tapas* ('to heat'), refers to a means of controlling the destructive passions that dwell within every human being, practised through *pranayama* (breath control); *brata* ('conduct' or 'practice') refers to the restraint of eating, drinking, and sleeping. Geertz's (1960) ethnographic account of Javanese religious life situates this ascetic vocabulary within a wider repertoire of spiritual disciplines still practised across the *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* strands of Javanese religious life, underscoring that *tapa brata* in *wayang* narrative is not a purely literary device but reflects lived religious practice.

The aim of *tapa brata* is to manage negative desires so that they do not obstruct the spiritual perfection sought through *samadi* (meditative absorption). When a person fails in *tapa brata*, they likewise fail to attain the perfection of *samadi* and, in this framework, inevitably fall into suffering — as illustrated by the story of Batara Guru, who, while wandering the world with his consort, transgressed and was punished with an ogre-formed son, Batara Kala, symbolising an ugly and malevolent being. This narrative stands as an example that, however elevated one's status or power, unworthy conduct will inevitably yield an unworthy consequence; the author has examined the ritual and ethical implications of this narrative at length elsewhere in relation to the *ruwatan Murwakala* (Kasidi, 2017).

This ethical framework is not incidental to the musical argument of this study. It is precisely because narrative content in *wayang* carries this kind of moral weight that the tonal and formal choices examined in the following subsections — the pairing of particular *pathet* with particular dramatic registers, the mystical associations of specific *gending* — are treated by the tradition as consequential rather than arbitrary. Musical choice, in other words, inherits its significance from the same ethical-cosmological order that governs the narrative itself. This is the point at which the present account departs from readings that treat *wayang*'s symbolic content and its musical structure as separate objects of analysis. Symbolic studies of *wayang* have tended to concentrate on visual and narrative form — on the iconography of characters and the moral typology they encode (Hidajat, 2009; Subiyantoro et al., 2020) — while musical studies have concentrated on structure and *garap*. The argument advanced here is that the two are governed by a single order, and that the evidence for this lies in the fact that the tonal system itself is cosmologically indexed, as the following subsection sets out.

Art, Truth, and Aesthetic Experience in Wayang Performance

The connection between *wayang* performance and aesthetic truth may also be considered through a more structural, philosophical lens. Gadamer argues that art contains a form of truth (as discussed in Palmer, 2005, p. 92) – a truth that is broadly recognised for its own internal logic, even though it is not arrived at through discursive reasoning and may, in fact, run counter to it. This can be illustrated through the performance of the *wayang kulit lakon Murwakala*, in the delivery of *suluk*, a solo vocal narration sung by the *dalang*. The technical illustrations that follow reflect the author's own practitioner knowledge as a *dalang*, set out more fully in an earlier study of *sulukan* in the Yogyakarta tradition (Kasidi, 2011), rather than claims drawn from a separate documentary source. In certain types of *suluk*, when the final tone falls on note 6 while the gong simultaneously sounds note 2, the resulting sonic effect is known as *gembyung*. Another example is the convention whereby the large gong is struck slightly after – by half a beat or more – the final tone of the *suluk* or of the gamelan *ricikan*; this delayed effect produces a distinct sense of release in the listener. Similarly, the repeated vocalisations *ong*, *heng*, and *hong* within *suluk* singing lend an aesthetic impression to those who hear them.

Such patterns reflect a broader tendency within Javanese culture, in which aesthetic sensibility manifests through everyday behaviour – permissiveness, conflict avoidance, respect for elders – such that artistic creation inevitably expresses aesthetic values rooted in the substance of that culture's various art forms. The beauty found in a work of art originates in the human capacity to comprehend the patterns of the universe: the artist perceives relationships within nature through feeling and then re-expresses them in a clarified, objectified form. What matters is not only the artwork's material form but also the subjective dimension of the experience it produces in its beholder – art as a logical aesthetic form capable of yielding genuine satisfaction for its audience.

On this more precise accounting, the *gending* of *karawitan pakeliran* constitutes a balanced and harmonious unity of at least seven essential elements embedded within the dimensions of *wayang* art: dramatic art, painting, craft, literature, vocal art, *karawitan*, and stylistic art (Haryanto, 1988, pp. 2–9). The narrative structure of a *wayang lakon*, from beginning to end, fully contains these elements throughout its presentation; the broader claim made earlier that *wayang* is Indonesia's most complete traditional art form is, in this more precise sense, grounded in Haryanto's (1988) sevenfold typology rather than a separate or redundant observation.

Tonal Symbolism, Ethics, and the Cosmological Grounding of Gending

The aesthetic concept of *karawitan pakeliran* accompaniment refers, at its core, to the harmonious relationship among the sonic elements of gamelan music as they arrange the accompaniment for a *wayang* narrative. In essence, this is a relationship between form and content: form concerns the physical structure of *wayang gending* – such as *lancaran*, *ladrang*, *ketawang*, *gending*, *ayak-ayakan*, *playon*, and *sampak* – while content concerns the specific systems of musical treatment (*garap*) applied to those forms, including the standardised repertoire of *wayang* accompaniment codified by Nojowirongko (1960). Clarifying this relationship between form and content is essential to understanding the aesthetic connection between structure and substance in *karawitan pakeliran*.

A broader reflection on gamelan aesthetics was offered by the influential educator Ki Hadjar Dewantara, who observed that one of the most effective modes of cultivating emotional sensitivity is through the traditional art of gamelan composition. The study of *gending*, in his view, serves not merely as a vehicle for intuitive knowledge and technical skill in gamelan performance, but also as a means of awakening inner life: gamelan *gending* guides human thought toward a rhythmic sense of beauty (*rhythmisch gevoel*), animates an aesthetic

sensibility (*aesthetisch gevoel*), and quiets a sense of moral refinement (*ethisch gevoel*) (Sumarsam, 2003, pp. 168–169). This relationship between gamelan composition and Javanese ethical-aesthetic concepts is one expression of the everyday life of Javanese society, discernible through attitude, behaviour, and modes of social interaction. Sularso et al. (2023) have recently proposed a socio-karawitanological framework for exactly this relation, arguing that gamelan's cultural effects are best read as a two-way traffic between musical practice and social formation rather than as a matter of music expressing a pre-existing value system. The present analysis supports that direction of argument at the level of performance practice, while noting that in *pakeliran*, unlike in the concert contexts they discuss, the traffic is mediated by a narrative whose moral content is itself explicit.

The ethical dimension is visible, for instance, in the etiquette observed while playing *ricikan* gamelan instruments: all musicians sit cross-legged, and none stand while performing. In Javanese cultural understanding, sitting cross-legged expresses respect toward those seated opposite; a player in this posture almost invariably directs their gaze downward, with the face and head following suit in a lowered position. This posture, adopted without conscious deliberation, flows naturally and produces a profound sense of deference and courtesy. Playing gamelan is thus, in itself, a form of moral education (*budi pekerti*) that fosters better horizontal relationships among people.

The aesthetic concept underlying *karawitan pakeliran gending* also connects to mythic dimensions: the deployment of particular *gending* in a *wayang* presentation is intended, in part, to evoke a mystical atmosphere. Certain *gending* are understood to carry a specifically mystical character, functioning, for example, to accompany a prayer recited just before the *dalang* draws the *gunungan* (the tree-of-life puppet) from the centre of the screen – typically performed without spoken narration. This mystical function is illustrated more concretely through the tonal territory of the gamelan: tone 1, referred to as *barang*, and tone 5, referred to as *lima*, belong to the tonal region known as *pathet sanga*. These two tonal regions serve as reference points for constructing *gending* compositions that guide and produce a solemn, weighty vocal quality – appropriate and conventionally used for the recitation of prayers and mantras addressed to God. The power carried by tones 1 and 5 is understood to correspond to the symbolism of *keblat papat lima pancer* (the four cardinal directions with a fifth, central axis) within Javanese cosmological thought (Sumukti, 2005, pp. 84–95).

This is the study's most consequential finding, and it requires care in the stating. Hastanto (2009) gives the authoritative technical account of *pathet* as a modal system, defined by tonal hierarchy, register, and position in the night's sequence; his account is deliberately musical rather than symbolic. Sumukti (2005) gives the cosmological reading, in which the same tones are indexed to the *keblat papat lima pancer* schema. Neither account requires the other, and it would be a mistake to treat the cosmological correspondence as an explanation of the modal system, or the modal system as a mere vehicle for cosmological content. What the present analysis shows is that in *pakeliran* the two descriptions converge on the same practical decisions: the *pathet* a *dalang* is in determines which *gending* are available, and the symbolic weight attaching to particular tones determines which of the available *gending* is fitting for a prayer, a ritual moment, or a scene of moral reckoning. Musical constraint and cosmological significance are therefore not two interpretations of the same practice but two conditions that a single choice must simultaneously satisfy. This is what makes the *pathet* transition a genuinely integrative moment rather than merely a structural one.

A historical qualification is necessary. The 1990s marked a significant shift in the conventions of *wayang* performance, with the emergence of flashback scenes at the opening of a *lakon*. This development brought a corresponding shift in the character of *wayang gending*, with accompaniment becoming markedly more prominent and illustrative in orientation, often relying primarily on the sonic qualities of the gamelan itself rather than adherence to any

single named *gending* (Kasidi, 2004). Because this periodisation originates in the author's own earlier documentation, it was checked against three independent accounts before being retained here. Sumarsam (2013) traces a comparable late-twentieth-century move toward more illustrative, less formula-bound accompaniment across Javanese performing arts under Western theatrical and musical influence; Soetarno (2004, 2011) describes the same period as one in which the ritual functions of *wayang* were increasingly subordinated to its entertainment functions, with consequent changes in *pedalangan* style; and Sudarko's (2016) comparison of Surakarta and Yogyakarta scene structures documents the divergence in scene organisation within which such changes took hold. The convergence of four independent accounts on the same period supports the periodisation while locating its cause more broadly than the introduction of flashback scenes alone.

What this shift does not do is displace the framework. To make sense of the range of *karawitan pakeliran gending* now in use – including the freer, more illustrative treatments that have become common since the 1990s and, more recently, the hybrid presentation techniques that digital dissemination has encouraged – the aesthetic model proposed by Soetarno et al. (2007) remains the more appropriate reference point, serving as the basis for determining the suitability of a given *gending*, that is, whether and how well it supports the atmosphere of the scene it accompanies. The functions are sufficiently general to accommodate accompaniment that abandons named *gending* altogether: a passage of undifferentiated gamelan sonority that colours a flashback is performing *nglambari* as surely as a named *ladrang* would. In practice, virtually every type of *gending* employed by a *dalang* is calibrated to the dramatic requirements of the scene currently unfolding, and it is this calibration, rather than adherence to any particular repertoire, that the framework describes.

CONCLUSION

The aesthetics of *karawitan pakeliran* in *wayang kulit purwa* cannot be adequately understood through musical or dramaturgical analysis alone. Music in this tradition is not an accompaniment to the drama but one of the media through which the drama is constituted, and its aesthetic function operates on three levels: framing the dramatic action, reinforcing its mood, and merging with the unfolding narrative. Read against the documented case of *Irawan Rabi*, that threefold framework proves to be more than a retrospective analytic description. It is a retrospective articulation of a pedagogical norm that was already operative, in codified form, some four decades before the framework was formulated – standardised closely enough to be taught from a compendium and, in Brandon's translation, rendered intelligible as a coherent artistic whole to readers with no access to the tradition. The framework's functions, moreover, operate inside a modal structure that has already constrained the available choices, which means they describe how a puppeteer moves within a frame rather than how that frame is set.

The study's principal theoretical contribution lies in showing that musical constraint and cosmological significance are not two competing interpretations of the same practice but two conditions that a single compositional choice must simultaneously satisfy. The mode a puppeteer is working in determines which compositions are available; the symbolic weight attaching to particular tones determines which of the available compositions is fitting for a given ritual or moral moment. This is why a change of mode in this tradition is an integrative event rather than merely a structural one, and why the ethical world of the narratives cannot be bracketed off from the analysis of the music. For practitioners and for the institutions that train them, it follows that instruction in repertoire and instruction in the ethical and cosmological order are not separable curricula; for scholarship, it follows that symbolic and musical studies of shadow theatre have been analysing two aspects of one object rather than two objects.

Three limitations qualify these claims. The study is conceptual and library-based rather than ethnographic, and its account of performance practice is therefore mediated by the written record and by the author's own practice rather than by systematic observation of a range of contemporary puppeteers. The grounded illustration rests on a single play, chosen because it satisfies an unusual documentary condition, and its correspondence with the framework was established at the level of overall dramatic structure rather than scene by scene. And the analysis is confined to the Central Javanese tradition, within which the Surakarta and Yogyakarta styles differ in ways this article has not systematically separated.

Each limitation indicates the research that should follow. The most immediate task is a complete scene-by-scene correlation between the prescribed musical treatment and the translated dialogue of the same play, which would convert the structural correspondence demonstrated here into a detailed philological finding. Beyond that, the framework invites testing against contemporary performance: against recordings of the freer, more illustrative accompaniment that has become common since the 1990s, and against the hybrid forms now circulating through digital media, where the question of whether the three functions survive the loss of named repertoire can be settled empirically rather than argued. Comparative work with the Balinese and East Javanese traditions, and with other music-theatre forms in which a modal system carries symbolic as well as structural weight, would establish how far the account offered here reaches beyond the tradition that produced it.

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Ethical approval and informed consent. Not applicable. The study involved no human participants and no fieldwork in ritual or restricted settings, and analyses only published materials; no images of identifiable persons are reproduced.

Data availability. All materials underlying the findings are published works. Nojowirongko's compendium and the Indonesian-language *pedalangan* and *karawitan* sources are held in the libraries of Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta and Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta; the English-language sources are held in general academic collections. The analytical notes compiled for this study are available from the author on reasonable request.

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