

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

**ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-VI (November-December) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



## THE CULTURE OF 'WAYANG GOLEK' IN AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL, ONTOLOGICAL AND AXIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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| **Received:** 17.12.2024 | **Accepted:** 23.12.2024 | **Published:** 25.12.2024

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### Abstract

*Wayang Golek is a traditional cultural art in Indonesia, which contains very deep philosophical values. These philosophical values can be explored from the perspectives of epistemology, ontology and axiology, all three of which are an integral part of the Philosophy of Science. For this reason, this research aims to reveal the philosophical values of Wayang Golek from the perspective of epistemology, ontology and axiology. This research uses a philosophical-phenomenological approach and uses interdisciplinary-qualitative analysis to analyze the philosophical meaning of the wayang golek performance phenomenon, both from knowledge and moral and religious aspects. From this research, it was concluded that epistemologically, wayang golek functions as a medium for cultural inheritance through the symbolism of figures and oral traditions that convey moral, social and spiritual teachings to society. Ontologically, wayang golek represents the values of truth, moral and spiritual values. The messages of honesty, courage, loyalty and love for the country are reflected in the characters, such as Semar, Arjuna, Bima, Gatotkaca, and others. Wayang golek is not just a wooden puppet, but a symbol of the victory of the struggle of good against evil. Axilogically, wayang golek is useful for applying noble values in life. Thus, wayang golek is not just entertainment but is a space for reflection to understand moral and spiritual values in society.*

**Keywords:** Wayang Golek, Epistemology, Ontology, Axiology, Sundanese Culture.

## Introduction

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world, containing more than 17,000 islands, including five main islands: Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Papua. As a large country, Indonesia has a rich culture that is very diverse and reflects the characteristics of local culture and traditions of each region. One of the traditional local cultural arts referred to here is Wayang Golek, which historically appeared in West Java with typical Sundanese regional characteristics. The art of wayang golek continues to develop, especially in West Java, with the local wisdom of Sundanese culture. These wayang golek performances and stories reflect the harmony between humans, nature and spirituality, packaged with local Sundanese cultural wisdom.

Wayang golek is a local cultural art which is a legacy of the people of West Java which has experienced quite significant development over its long history. Many story plays presented in wayang golek performances feature stories containing epistemology, ontology and axiology content which are very interesting to be studied seriously. For this reason, this article will discuss and analyze in depth the three contents, as will be explained below.

### Wayang Golek as a Cultural Arts Heritage

Before discussing wayang golek in more depth, it is first necessary to explain the meaning of the term "Wayang Golek". Wayang golek is a three-dimensional puppet made of wood, round and thick with human-like limbs. The lower part and legs are covered with clothes of various patterns and colors. This golek doll can be enjoyed as a means of personifying the stories being played. Golek's appearance visually symbolizes the character of the characters played in each episode. The color of her clothes and skin color of her body parts, especially the color of her face, supports the value of "Wanda". Facial color is a sign of a puppet's character (Sabunga, 2016). In the art of wayang golek, Wanda is a depiction of the face or facial features of a wayang golek character which is the embodiment of the character and basic disposition of the character. Wanda can be seen as an expression that appears on the face and body shape of a wayang golek character, such as shoulders, stomach size, size of feet and hands and the clothes worn. Wanda is the main supporting element in the drama performance of wayang golek. Understanding wayang wayang is very important to understand the names of the wayang, characters, and their roles in the play or scene.

Wayang Golek is a cultural art that has been passed down from one generation to the next, so that wayang golek has become a part of the entertainment scene in society. The meaning of the term "culture" is often equated with the term *colere* which in Latin means working the land, cultivating, looking after the fields. Etymologically, the word "Culture" comes from Sanskrit, *Buddhayah*, the plural form of the word *buddhi* which means reason or mind. So culture can be interpreted as a way of life that is developed and shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation (Muslimah, 2021: 105). People in West Java began to know wayang in 1455 Saka or 1533 AD in the Batutulis Inscription. Meanwhile, according to The American Heritage Dictionary, culture is a whole pattern of behavior that is transmitted through social life, art, institutions, and all the results of human work and thought from a human group (Sadono, 2019: 150).

Based on this explanation, it can be understood that culture is a system that includes ideas or notions that exist in human thinking, which are often referred to as ideal forms. Apart from that, culture

also reflects various patterned human activities, which are known as forms of social systems. The form of culture in physical form is in the form of objects created by humans as cultural creatures. All aspects of this culture function to support humans in living in society.

If culture is meant as explained above, then wayang golek can be seen as a cultural heritage, the birth of which came from the idea of a servant of the Regent of Bandung (Karang Anyar). He commissioned Ki Darman to make a wayang golek form from wood. Ki Darman, who at that time lived in the Cibiru area, West Java, tried to carry out the task of making wayang golek. Initially, this wayang was still made from leather, namely flat or "dwi matra" or "two dimensions" (Sadono, 2019: 150), and continued to undergo refinement in its shape to become the wayang golek made of wood as we see today. So this wayang golek can be seen as the result of important achievements of our ancestors in the past. Thus wayang golek can be considered a cultural heritage of Indonesia, especially West Java. Nowadays, wayang golek is considered the property of all Indonesian people. The contents are ethics and aesthetics that reflect the shared culture of Indonesian society. This culture lasted quite a long time and continued to survive for centuries. The performance of this wayang golek always attracts the attention of people at home and abroad (Rukiah, 2015).

As a medium that broadens cultural horizons, wayang golek can be seen as a cultural heritage art that shapes the character of local culture, especially Sundanese culture and Indonesian culture in general, which makes the Indonesian people more aware of their identity (Parto, 2023: 89–99). In the performances, epic stories such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata not only display moral values but also reflect respect for the environment, society, culture and religion.

### Epistemology of Wayang Golek

The term "epistemology" comes from the Greek word "episteme" which means knowledge or truth. Meanwhile, "logos" means words, thoughts, or knowledge of the nature, character and type of knowledge. The word episteme in Greek comes from the verb "epistamai" meaning to subdue, place or place (Kamil et al., 2023: 268–81). According to Simon Blackburn in *The Dictionary of Philosophy*, epistemology comes from the Greek episteme (knowledge) and logos (word/discussion/science), and when expressed means the branch of philosophy concerned with origins, essence, nature and types.

According to Amin Abdullah, epistemology is a branch of philosophy that discusses the nature, truth, sources, methods and structure of knowledge. For example, epistemology influences the shape of human civilization on a global scale, and specifically influences the development of science and technology (Pajriani et al., 2023: 89-282). Epistemology is a way of gaining knowledge, sources of knowledge and the scope of knowledge. As part of philosophy, epistemology examines the origins, basic assumptions, properties and how to obtain knowledge, so it is an important determinant in determining the philosophical model (Muslimah, 2021: 105).

The validity of the knowledge contained in wayang golek is strengthened by the community's collective acceptance as a cultural heritage that continues to survive. The values contained in wayang golek stories remain relevant because they touch on fundamental aspects of human life, such as ethics, justice and social relations.

The epistemology of wayang golek can be seen from the stories that describe how this traditional art creates, conveys and preserves knowledge in society. A lot of knowledge information is produced from wayang golek stories. From this it can be understood that the cultural art of wayang golek is a medium that not only functions for entertainment, but also as a means of education, a means of reflecting on good social life, and conveying very deep moral messages.

Wayang golek performances in recent developments are currently packaged using interactive methods. This can be seen from the interactive stories which are apparently liked by teenagers. These interactive stories are something new for teenagers, because they contain a mission to make teenagers aware of the importance of health. Here, wayang golek becomes a medium for health promotion for the community and also among teenagers. Puppet shows with interactive packaging are considered creative, interesting, funny, provide motivation and knowledge to teenagers regarding the dangers of smoking, the dangers of narcotics and illegal drugs (narcotics) and the dangers of promiscuity between men and women (Lestari, et.al., 2018: 32-125).

Furthermore, wayang golek is also a flexible epistemic space. The messages in the performance are always adapted to the socio-cultural context and issues that are relevant at the time. Social criticism is often implied through humor or dialogue between characters, allowing wayang to become a vehicle for subtle but meaningful reflection. From an epistemological perspective, this shows that knowledge in wayang is dynamic, not static. The source of knowledge extracted from wayang golek comes from a combination of local Sundanese traditions with other cultural influences such as Hindu literature which includes the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as Islamic values which acculturate harmoniously with Sundanese culture. For example, in the wayang golek narrative, it turns out that it is inserted with interpretations of verses from the Koran and Islamic religious teachings. This reminds us of a Sundanese cultural figure named KH. Hasan Musthafa, who conveyed a lot of Islamic preaching using Sundanese language and culture.

K.H. Hasan Mustofa, who is known as the ruler of Bandung and also a writer, once said that: "*Urang Sunda mah geus Islam memeh Islam*" (*Sundanese people already behaved Islamically before Islam came*). This fact can be proven in wayang golek plays, songs, rhymes and jokes. Laws in Sundanese society are also socialized through the art and culture of Wayang Golek. This suggests that almost all areas of Sundanese life contain Islamic values (Miharja, 2014:97). Through epistemological analysis, wayang golek can be seen as more than just a performing art, but as a medium for conveying Islamic teachings to society. Wayang Golek is a living medium of knowledge, reflecting the way Sundanese people understand the world, interact with cultural and religious values, and adapt to changing times.

To see wayang golek from an epistemological perspective, you can also look at the color of the clothes worn by the wayang golek characters. The colorful clothes worn by wayang golek characters are symbols or emblems that depict various human traits or characteristics. In the appearance of facial color, it can be the face of a teacher, close friend, enemy, or other roles that are often encountered in life. The audience of wayang golek performances can understand and interpret the words spoken by the wayang golek characters according to the "facial expressions" they display (Suganda, 2007: 60-248). Facial color is a sign of the character of

the puppet show itself. The appearance and color of a wayang golek character's face is usually understood by the audience of the performance. For example, a puppet who plays a character who is easily angry, arrogant, or greedy and the like, the color of his face must be red (Rukiah, 2015:583).

In Sundanese tradition and culture, the concept of using colors which have symbolic or emblematic meanings is known, which is then analogous to the cardinal directions. This concept is known as "*nu opat ka lima pancer*" (*the four radiate from the five cardinal directions*). This concept is interpreted to mean that "nu opat" (the four) indicates the cardinal directions: north, east, south and west, while "ka five" pancer (the fifth lulugu, leader) indicates the center or axis of the four cardinal directions, namely middle. So "nu opat kalima pancer" (English: the four radiate from the five cardinal directions) symbolizes nature, humans, earth, panca, middle (Rukiah, 2015:583).

### **Ontology of Wayang Golek**

Ontology according to the term is a science that discusses the nature of existence which is the ultimate reality, both in concrete physical and spiritual form (Muslimah, 2021:105). Ontology comes from the Greek words "Ontosa and Logosa". Ontos means existence and logos means knowledge. It can be interpreted as ontos or existence, namely essence, what exists, the question of what. And logos or science can be interpreted as a collection of knowledge that is arranged systematically so that it can be called science. Humans are creatures who are endowed with the potential for reason which will continuously and never stop thinking, and this reason is what differentiates humans from other creatures.

Ontology is a part of the philosophy of science that is very important for understanding the nature of everything that surrounds humans. In fact, it is important to know and question what lies behind reality (Prihanta et al., 2024: 60–79), including in this case the art of wayang golek. In this context, the ontological study of wayang golek is quite important to discuss. As a branch of philosophy that discusses the nature of existence, ontology can be used to understand the essence of the existence of wayang golek along with the philosophical value of wayang golek in the cultural and spiritual context of Sundanese society.

The ontology of wayang golek focuses on its existence and meaning as a cultural entity and spiritual value. Wayang golek is not just a wooden puppet, but a symbolic and functional medium that represents the moral values, philosophy of life and spirituality of Sundanese people. The message delivered by the puppeteer is then conveyed through discourses and sometimes also through satire which is adapted to the context of social problems occurring in the country. These messages are conveyed implicitly to the public so that they can find out about the current state of the government through wayang plays (Uli, 2017).

Wayang golek is indeed an inanimate object made of wood, but wayang golek seems to become an animate creature when played and moved by someone called a "dalang" (puppeteer). Or in other words, dalang is the term for a person who moves or plays wayang golek. The puppeteer not only acts as an actor who plays wayang characters, but he also acts as a transmitter of messages about daily life, religious teachings, and other moral messages to the audience (Sadono, 2019: 150). The content of these messages is closely related to the skills of a Dalang, because he is the one who gives "life" to the wayang golek through narration and movement.

Puppet performances reflect the ontological dualism between good and bad, truth and evil which is a reflection of human struggle. Apart from that, wayang golek functions as a metaphysical bridge between humans, nature and God, and creates a space for dialogue between traditionality and modernity. This is where the ontological approach clarifies the position of wayang golek which is not just a performing art, but is a living, relevant and meaningful entity in the context of Sundanese culture. The character of the character "Bujang Ganong" with a face shaped like "Wayang Golek Reyog Ponorogo", for example, has a physical description of bulging eyes, a red face which is not interpreted as a "fierce" character but instead is a character who is patient, loves family and really loves his country which can be used as an example. the character of a society as a form of obedience to leaders and the state (Wulandari, et.al., 2019: 59-451).

### **Axiology of Wayang Golek**

The term "axiology" comes from Ancient Greek, namely "aksios" which means value and the word "logos" means theory or science. So, axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies values. In other words, axiology is a theory of value (Syafitri, 2021: 320). This means that value is related to the presence of humans as subjects. If there are no humans who provide value, then that value will never exist. Axiology is a branch of philosophy of science that questions how humans use their knowledge and how it is implemented (Nasir, 2021: 2457). In this context, the axiological perspective on wayang golek actually discusses the values contained in wayang golek. The axiology of wayang golek focuses on how this art makes a moral, aesthetic and social contribution to society. For this reason, wayang golek is not only valued as a medium of entertainment, but also as a means that is rich in cultural and ethical values.

Wayang golek functions as a conveyer of universal moral messages. The message expressed in the form of this work of art is a reflection and an appropriate means of communication so that moral values become entrenched in society. These moral values play an important role in developing the nation's personality. Nation building is best when it is based on moral values. Values are not goals, but they function as factors in choosing goals that are beneficial to human life. One form of traditional cultural art that is able to express the values of life in society is the art of wayang golek performance (Sauky, et.al, 2021: 67-155). Through the narrative, characters and conflicts presented, wayang performances teach values such as honesty, courage, loyalty and wisdom. In the art of wayang golek there are not only dalang (puppeteer) and wayang, there are also sinden (singers), gamelan players, puppet makers, and wayang golek painters, all of whom play a role in conveying moral messages.

Furthermore, it is also important to know that the wayang golek puppets and the use of Sundanese are symbols so that the people present can give their own interpretations. The application of the Sundanese cultural values "silih asih, silih asuh, and silih asah" has been indirectly felt by the people who watch the wayang golek performance. The application of Sundanese cultural values is carried out by the "dalang" (Puppeteer), so that the puppeteer plays a very important role in playing the wayang golek storyline. The puppeteers master Sundanese language and culture, so they can be seen as a reflection of the meaning and values of Sundanese culture itself. The skill of a puppeteer can be proven when the wayang story has entered the part of the story which contains guidance and advice containing good teachings which are always conveyed to

the audience.

Through wayang golek performances, this performance has had a real influence on social life, because the stories predominantly contain the teachings of goodness that humans have received since childhood. Apart from that, wayang golek performances provide benefits from various aspects, including social, political, economic and religious aspects for the people who watch, in order to convey the values of the common good. These good values are displayed by a wayang golek character named "Semar", he symbolizes the wisdom of small people who are full of simplicity but have a big influence. Honesty and wisdom, for example, are depicted through figures such as "Darmakusumah", who carries out his duties as a leader with integrity and fairness. Courage can be seen from the character named "Bima", who is not afraid to defend the truth. Sincere loyalty is depicted in the character named "Anoman", who serves wholeheartedly to bring about justice. Meanwhile, a sense of love for the homeland or nationalism can be found in the character "Kumbakarna", which shows a willingness to make sacrifices for the safety of his nation and country. On the other hand, the antagonist character attached to a puppet character named "Rahwana" is a reminder of the consequences of greed and evil. The greedy and evil behavior displayed by "Rahwana" must be banished from human souls.

In this context, the axiology of wayang golek creates an ethical reflection for the audience, helping them understand and distinguish good and bad values in life. So, the axiological perspective on wayang golek can be understood from the good values displayed by the characters. From this it can be understood that the art of wayang golek makes a moral, aesthetic and social contribution to society. In this context, wayang golek is not only valued as a medium of entertainment, but also as a means that is rich in cultural and ethical values. This is the axiological perspective of wayang golek performances.

With axiological content that is beneficial for human life, from the past until now, wayang golek performances are still popular with the public. The wayang golek story package can be enjoyed as a spectacle that is fresh, communicative, educative, and of course very entertaining (Cahya, 2019: 484). This further proves that wayang performances not only act as a means of entertainment, but also carry an important mission as a way of life that can be applied by society. Through stories played by a "dalang" (puppeteer), wayang golek becomes an effective medium for conveying moral teachings and deep life values. In each play, noble values are presented through the characters who make the story seem alive.

Wayang golek is a reflection of life values through the symbolism displayed. Each story raises the theme of the battle between good and evil, presenting lessons about balance in life. The philosophy contained in it not only functions as theoretical thinking but is also integrated into society's culture. This tradition is rooted in a view of life that has been passed down from generation to generation and is reflected in everyday actions.

The philosophical meaning of wayang golek is designed based on observations of human life and the universe. With its unique approach, wayang golek performances become a space to explore a more basic understanding of cultural values and the symbolic meanings they contain. For this reason, from an axiological perspective it can be understood that wayang golek is not just an artistic performance, but also an educational medium that teaches character or morality and strengthens human relationships with

their traditions and heritage.

## Conclusion

From the description above, it can be understood that wayang golek is a cultural heritage, which is not only an entertainment performance art, but also a medium that contains the Sundanese people's view of life, depicting the relationship between humans, nature and God. Wayang golek is a cultural art that is rich in epistemological, ontological and axiological values.

Epistemologically, wayang golek is a source of knowledge that contains moral, spiritual and social values. This knowledge is obtained through the symbolism of the characters, the narratives conveyed by the dalang (puppeteer), and local wisdom adapted from various influences, including Hindu literature and Islamic values. With a reflective approach, wayang golek creates a space for education and reflection that continues to be relevant in people's lives.

Ontologically, wayang golek has a multidimensional existence. It is an artistic entity that is both material (wooden doll) and metaphysical (representation of life values). Wayang performances visualize the dualistic conflict between good and evil, which not only reflects human struggles, but also the cosmological order in Sundanese culture.

Axiologically, wayang golek has a function as a medium of education and entertainment. Moral values such as honesty, courage, loyalty and love of the country are conveyed effectively through the characters. Apart from that, wayang golek also plays a role in strengthening social relations in society through performances that are part of communal traditions.

Thus, it is clear that wayang golek can be seen as a medium that reflects society's perspective on life, is a means of exploring meaning and creating cultural values. Wayang golek, in all its complexity, is a reflection of the depth of Sundanese culture and philosophy, which remains relevant today.

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