



The noble character-based learning in the ornaments of Kraton Yogyakarta: A visual analysis of Javanese cultural heritage

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ABSTRACT

In the context of art as a language, ornament also functions as a visual language, because in Javanese culture there is a tradition to express an idea, expression, and moral message containing learning about noble morals through ornamentation. This paper aims to analyze what are the noble moral-based learning contained in ornaments in Kraton Yogyakarta and what influenced them. Data were obtained through field observation, interviews, and literature studies. The results showed that the decorative figural art and ornamentation in Javanese culture are not only visually captivating but also convey profound cultural, religious, and moral meanings, making them an essential part of the Javanese cultural heritage. The visual narrative of ornaments was mainly influenced by cultural acculturation in Javanese society, while noble character-based learning was the result of religious syncretism and belief in Javanese culture.

Keywords: Noble character, Javanese culture, ornament, Kraton Yogyakarta

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INTRODUCTION

Javanese culture is a product of kingdom hegemony in two kingdoms as the center of Javanese culture namely Yogyakarta and Surakarta. The views of life and life principles in Javanese culture are closely connected to the syncretism of pre-Hinduist, Buddhist, and Islamic beliefs. In Javanese culture, life is derived from the spiritual causality of God and human beings seek to shape the perfection of life by unifying themselves with God. God is a universal nature or an absolute being, a universal nature is God's embodiment, a universal nature and human is an entity commonly called macro-cosmos and micro-cosmos (Abdullah Ciptoprawiro, 1976, p. 22). God is abstract and human beings are real; the former is placed as the central point of material object presence, and the latter understand the existence of an abstract God represented in nature; the cycle of nature is life and human life.

The causal relationship between God and nature in the Javanese Culture becomes the principle of life, i.e., nature is the object and the subject. The role of nature as an object marks the cycle of nature as a life lesson. Humans learn from, about, and within the cycle of nature, and in nature, there are lessons about space and time and how to utilize them in human life. Nature can be packed, created, or utilized for the benefit of human life. Nature plays a role as a subject, and

nature is placed as a teacher for life. The living doctrine of nature in Javanese is commonly called *piwulang lan piweling* or lessons and warnings. The content of living doctrine derives from events, natural events, and life lessons in terms of preserving and exploiting nature for life (*Memayu hayuning bawana*). In this sense, the expected moral message is a balance between the use of nature (nature) and human behavior through the understanding of taste or flavor (Mulder, 2001, p. 31). Teachings are packed with a visual language style through natural personification into basic shapes and ornamental motifs. The lessons and teachings are packaged in the distinctive symbols of Javanese culture. These symbols or symbols as a means or medium aim to entrust a message or advice to people (Herusatoto, 2008, p.1).

This message is visualized on visual narrative as an ornamental artwork; furthermore, the ornament is based on the poetic genotext taste. The poetic nature of an ornamental genotext motif representatively takes an asymmetrical form that has the same meaning and similar symmetrical motifs have different meanings. This homologous nature engenders a construction of the ornament so that it becomes a genotext. The system in the palace hegemony requires that an ornamental motif must fulfill a diglossy-regulated standard. The diglossy principle associated with the strata of society and regulation is expressed through solid forms as reliefs. Questioning the poetic taste, the aesthetic execution of the motive form is mainly based on theoretical constructions: *yasa*, *rawit*, and *racik* known as *karawitan* principles. *Yasa* or creation is the packaging of ornaments of formulated ornaments so that it is meaningfully symbolic, decorative, and constructive. The symbolic principle of ornamental motif lies in the translation of forms that may produce a connotative-genotext meaning. The creation of this technique for the glory of the Muslim empire is governed following Islamic law on the prohibition of describing living things in a realist fashion. The principle of *yasa* is similar to Aristotle's aesthetic order, namely wholeness, unity, complexity, and coherence (Ingram Bywater, 1954, p. 223; Teeuw, 1984, pp. 120-122). The principle of the moral message of noble character is a message that must be conveyed to the hegemony. Finally, the delivery of a form is homologous and metaphorical. This metaphorical concept becomes a principle of creation in symbolic ornaments containing a moral message. The setting of *yasa* begins to make up the visual elements and messages behind the power of *piweling lan piweling* (Pamadhi, 2010) called a vision of trust.

One example of Javanese ornamentation is a chronogram (*candrasengkala*) or *sengkalan memet* that contains messages, visions, histories and hopes. Message readings are associated with shapes, and colors of ornamental motifs, and one can read the meaning of social and cultural marks of the merely supportive community. According to Arnold J Toynbee in Hans Meyerhoff, ed. (1959, p. 11), the ornamental motif features a dual dimension, namely the literary and cultural dimensions and the historical dimension. The strict requirements of this creation produce the basic form or ornamental motif that ultimately becomes homologous and connotative. Characteristics of homologous ornamental motifs involve the same basic shape but different functions. This homologous composition turns out to be analogical in that its arrangement of natural forms is manifested through metaphors. A narrative visual chronogram is a result of idiosyncratic belief and institutional way of heterogeneity in which the work contains space and time including the alternative public space. Castings give the public a chance to read things using logic and logical interpretation, and it deals with complexity (according to Monroe Beardsley).

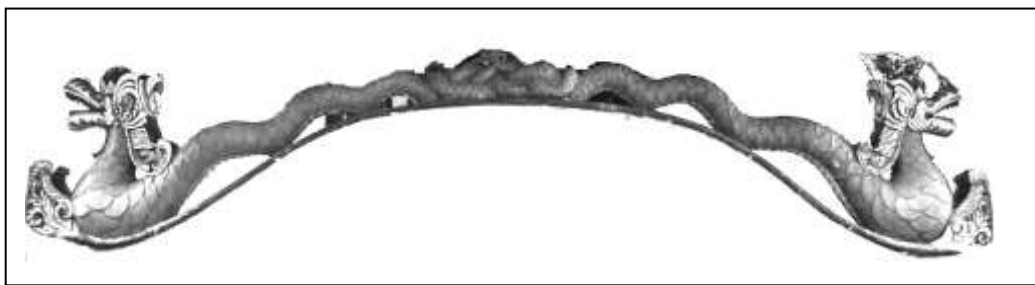


Figure 1. The symbol of Chronogram “Dwinaga rasa tunggal”

Chronogram above symbolizes *Dwi naga rasa tunggal*, which means 'two dragons in one taste'. The word *dwi* and its formation have a value of 2, the dragon has a value of 8, the taste has a value of 6, and oneness has a value of 1. The *sengkalan* (a chronogram) shows the year 1682 (a Javanese year). This year delineates the establishment year of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and, at the same time, it became the year of 1170 or a *Hijriah* year, and the year of 1756 AD (Sintesis, 2007).

This visual ornament has a moral message that starts from understanding history (time) so that the history as a critical reflection on the existence of the palace or as a center of the struggle is upheld by the banner of anti-colonial freedom (a cognitive space): The year of establishment of Yogyakarta Sultanate Palace is 1682 or 1756; The meeting of two dragons is represented by a united tail; the left dragon with his eyes open indicates his joy and the dragon's right eye closing enjoys the confusion. The moral message conveyed is the unity of the heart, and the mind to realize the ideals of victory; Dragon in Chinese culture means the guardian of the world along with two dragons needing a balanced palace.

The formation of Javanese culture is a result of assimilation and acculturation from several cultures through *srawung* (a cultural dialog). In this cultural dialogue, there is a principle of cultural concentration whereas indigenous cultures serve as the focal point of new cultural developments. The Javanese Cultural Fanaticism (JCF) is defended by the urbanists in a constellation of heterogeneity. However, the urbanist is unwilling to be a member of the hegemony. The simultaneous developments occur, and the hegemony of the palace is positioned as a motivator, an executor, a compiler, and a regulator of creation in claiming the works of art. In this case, the palace (the king and his internal units) has the right to determine the system of evaluation and regulation of creation. Artistic and aesthetic claims are at the heart of the hegemony. The position of this kingdom has the right to have special powers and is considered to achieve a high aesthetic (on top of an aesthetic moment), and ends the work into which the palace collection adds a description to the educational value in it.

The convergence process is also carried out by the supporters of Javanese culture to select Western cultures or foreign cultures that are accepted and integrated into the institutions of the cultural system. The role of hegemony in cultural divergence especially in the Javanese culture is to provide feedback on the behavioral change for migrants (urbanists). The next process is concentration, namely the process of unifying and simultaneously strengthening the position of the Javanese cultural system in terms of the local wisdom system. In the creation (*yasa*) of art, the visualization of ideas or concepts goes hand in hand with the process of spirituality in life. The process of spirituality is based on the *Berayu Hayuning Bawana* principle which means that nature is always beautiful, and human behaviors are in harmony with nature. Its implementation in the creation of the smallest elemental ornaments of nature (geometric flora and fauna elements) becomes the motif of a natural ornament concerning human life. The doctrine is packed in many ways in which human life is controlled by God, a figure in the beliefs of Prahindhu and the period of Hindhu, Buddhism, and Islam. The beliefs in the type of spirit (Prahindhu's belief) become a pictorial painting capable of influencing others. In Javanese religions (i.e., religions of a pre-Islamic, Indian, or Roman Catholic), there is a belief that has a cosmic order of upper space in which goddesses empower, goddesses have powers to regulate the cosmos in God's will, while the lower space is for human beings led by kings. The uniqueness of kings lies in their authority

to make decisions in relation to the citizens in the lower space. All this relationship is visualized in an ornament (Jackob Sumarjo, 2002, p.20).

METHOD

This type of research is a description of research with material objects in the form of ornamental art and its formal object is the meaning of ornamental artwork. material data is taken directly through the choice of the type of motifs and the motif's role in an object. to discuss the meaning, an interpretation of the motive shape and the whole ornamental figure is carried out with semiotics. In this case, semiotics from C. Sander Peirce is selected, which contains views of objects from the angle of icons, indexes, and symbols. the interpretation of the material object will be explained in sequence by giving priority to the icon of a formal object, then explained the index and finally, the symbols can be interpreted.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The urbanists in social life appreciate each other including the appreciation toward the hegemony of Javanese culture. The urbanists in Yogyakarta are subject to the regulation of the palace. The urbanist style varies based on local origins and interests or professions. The urbanist life is based on the *piwulang lan piweling* principle. This microcosmic circle represents the life of the people of Yogyakarta namely the nobility is inside the *benteng* (in the middle) acting as the central point of shaping the surrounding culture. Public space becomes a place of aesthetic legality. The position of the Chinese urbanist diaspora locating in Ketandan (around the Beringharjo market) brings forth sciences namely red, yellow, green, white, and black domains. In the Javanese Islamic tradition, color is interpreted into ways of teaching: the fifth point of the pancer's qibla (four directions filled with color in its central determining point). The idea is modified.

Table 1: Impacts of colors on religions and beliefs

| No | Islamic teachings | Colors in the Chinese Diaspora | Buddhist Pantheon |
|----|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Personal | Center (yellow, soil). | Center |
| 2. | <i>Luwamah</i> | North (black, water element) | North |
| 3. | <i>Sufiah</i> | West (white, metal) | West |
| 4. | <i>Mutmainah</i> | East (green, wood) | East |
| 5. | Anger | South (red, fire) | South |

Source: Imam Baehaqie (2014)

The Buddhist Pantheon (Borobudur) gets input from gods in natural powers: Western, South, East, and North (Table 1). In each direction, it plays its own role, and in the middle with the attitude of *dharmacakra prawartana mudra* hands as the regulator and determinant of human life. Humans have the mind and the feeling to determine the direction of life. This concept influences the success of Islamic Mataram (Yogyakarta) by giving birth to standard colors by inserting black and white elements, as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | North Luwamah (Black, Water Element) | |
| West Sufiah (White, Metal) | Personal, Center (Yellow, Soil). | East Mutmainah (Green, Wood) |
| | South Anger (Red, Fire) | |

Figure 4. The Scheme of Modification Gods Pantheon in Basic Colors
Source: Imam Baehaqie (2014)

The realist representation in decorative figural art involves specific techniques and changes. Firstly, the true shadow of a body image is transformed into a *sungging* position, characterized by rhythmic horizontals. The *sungging* technique utilizes color gradation, starting from a thick shadow and gradually transitioning to a thin shadow in the middle. Secondly, there are homologous changes in color. In certain types of ornaments, white is replaced with gold, symbolizing pomp or neutrality.

According to Primadi (2009), visual representation in a visual narrative can have multiple conceptual meanings in terms of language and form. However, Carter (1990) argues that the image itself is a physical object and inherently possesses more than one interpretation. Black color is employed to represent darkness or shade in the depiction. The use of various colors in ornaments has a significant impact on the overall visual representation, symbolizing life and vitality.

In summary, the realist representation in decorative figural art involves techniques such as *sungging* and homologous changes in color. The visual narrative can hold multiple conceptual meanings, and different colors in ornaments add depth and symbolism to the overall representation. (Figure 4).

Discussion

Learning The hegemony of Javanese culture engenders the convention that the central role of a King (and his kingdom) is as a ruler for the outer nature (materials) such as the physical environment that regulates the micro-cosmos and the macro-cosmos. This conception is a derivation of the Hindu belief, in which Vishnu becomes a keeper, Shiva a destroyer, and Brahma a creator. The king's roles are spelled out as spiritual and material leaders in the sense of organizing laws, rules (customary institutions) as well as land, cultural, and economic regulations. In this case, there is a convention that the King is a spiritual leader who manages his religion and ritual systems. This convention takes its roots in religious organizations, and a line of history through which the King has the derived blood of the Prophet (Muhammad). The Hadith and its translations into the culture of Javanese culture utilize the prerogative King including the regulation of creation.

In fact, this regulation does not deviate from the Hadist precepts as already outlined and established by a king. For example, batik motifs and ornaments of *Gurdha*. A King is a descendant of King Singasari Wisnu Wardhana. In Singasari temple, there is a statue of King Wisnu Wardhana riding a Garuda bird. This bird in Hindhu's belief is the god Vishnu, and then his association as the king is a descendant of the god Vishnu. Regarding the regulation of Islam (hadith), a mentioned ban describes living things, and the bird is deformed into hoards or lars (Javanese rhymes). Islamic culture expands the creation (*yasa*) by blending Hinduist and Islamic

elements in the ornament, i.e., realistic depictions must be decorative (modified). The king of Mataram is also considered the king of Majapahit, which is why the Hindu (Gurdha) motif always attaches to the king's dress (*Parang Barong Gurdha*).³

In the teachings of Sufism (Islam), *Gurdha*, or the eagle is imagined as a bird driving to God. Another connotation of *Garuda* is the ultimate beast protection to gain a calm life. It refers to *Tasawuf*, Islamic Mysticism, or a method in Islamic teachings that emphasizes unity with Allah's absolutism (Hakim in Simuh, 2002:25), and to unify with Allah, a person must purify his or her soul in advance (Yudhi, 2012: 21).

The phrase '*Memayu Hayuning Bawana*' is a proverb (HB I) that believes in nature as a great cosmic. *Memayu Hayuning Bawana* means creating the world (nature and environment) to be good and in harmony with nature. Life and human life must be in harmony with nature, and nature is used as the basic motive of batik (e.g., *batik sekar jagad*, *sekar* means flower, *jagad* means world). Ornamental motifs that take the idea of nature include four principles of batik motifs such as geometric, flora, and fauna positions of nature controlled by god (as a figural motif). The motif of nature is depicted decoratively (due to obeying the realistic prohibition of depiction in Islam) in decorative ornaments. A *Gurdha* motif or a *garuda* bird epitomizes the power and safety guards of King Singasari Wisnuwardana; this bird is modified in the form of *jarik* (a Javanese clothing motif) style consisting of wings and bodies and even in the classical time it merely represents wings. *Garuda* is also a vehicle of Wisnu to enter heaven

Javanese teaching: The noble character

Javanese culture is an acculturation of cultures brought by the beliefs of Prahindhu Java religions: Buddhism, Islam, and China. The belief of Prahindhu is animism and dynamism which results in the belief that the eternal spirit and the forces of nature are the representation of God. Such trust values the primal causation of God – humans cannot relate directly to God, but it can be realized through gods. Allah cannot be imagined through any way or thing, even a close distance or even further is untouchable for Allah; He is unlimited. In Javanese, it is commonly called *dat kang tan kenan kinayangapa*, *cedhak tanpa senggolan*, *adoh tanpa wangenan* (in Western cultures it is called immanence-transcendence) (Poerbotjaraka in Abdullah Ciptaprawira, 1976, p.23).

The belief of Hindhu eventually became a religion and it was a systematic notion of a god that linked to religion. Religion is a way to the perfection of life. A perfect life will not repeat itself, nor does it return to live the life of the world. This belief is called *Kejawen*. *Kejawen*-ridden area is an area until the end of the Dipanegara War directly under the kingdom of Surakarta and Yogyakarta along with Mangkunegaran and Pakualaman. This area is assumed to be isolated from the influence of Dutch direct rule until 1830 and is considered to represent the pure and sophisticated Javanese tradition of life (Laksono, 2009, p. 4).

They have the belief that harmony with nature is called *Memayu Hayuning Bawana*, the main association in running life. The basic idea in this sense is the result of the syncretism of Buddhism, in which human life with nature is governed and led by gods; the role of the next god is a God care-taker who communicates with humans through the gods. God connotes the spirits to be able to penetrate halo (*nimbus*) to God. These spirits are referred to as living beings in the world (life in the hereafter) and imaginary, such as the spirit of the ancestors, gods, or the like. Coarse creatures are identical to those who have rough thinking like spending nature that becomes artificial, or changing nature for the necessities of life. Regarding the position of human beings as rough creatures, it is believed that they are incapable of receiving a subtle whisper from God. This perception produces the idea that there must be a spirit capable of delivering humans when communicating with the creator. God is placed as an intermediary because it can read God's position. Viewed from this system, there is a perfect human idealization; i.e., human beings are capable of translating *piwulang lan piweling* (lessons and warnings). Islam strengthens the

conception of an archetypal man through the syncretism that combines *Kejawen* with other ideas, as stated below:

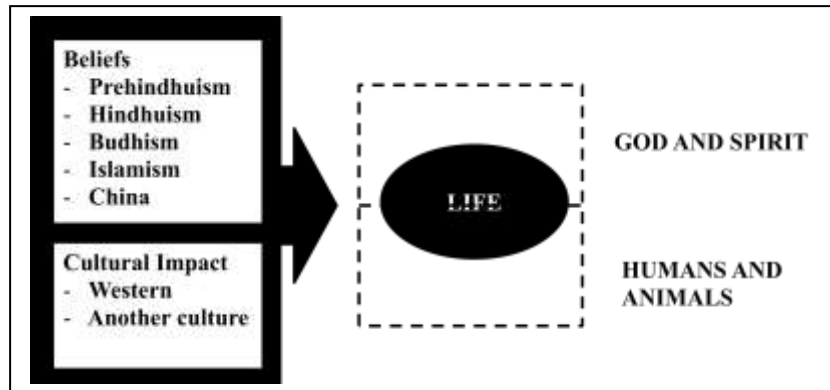


Figure 2: The Scheme of the Process of Life Spirit in Javanese Culture

The compilation of trust occurs in syncretism, and its influence is a moral message and a view of life. A collaboration produces ornamental motif creations. This constellation provides a unique picture that in the Javanese culture unites and syncretizes beliefs and brings forth new cultures. Some old cultural roots are still preserved, but some have been united with others. The advantage of the constellation in Javanese society is the desire for self-assertion, but not vice versa. The protestation of aesthetic legitimacy is its characteristic, and the lower society takes the pattern of hegemony. This cultural dialogue has a principle of tolerance and appreciation.

Yogyakarta's hegemony centered on Yogyakarta's palace is regulated by the institution of the hegemonic system. A hegemony becomes a pattern of a non-hegemonic society, for example, the procession of marriage by community groups outside the hegemony of the palace. The decoration, clothing, property, and clothing refer to the tradition of the palace, but it is closely related to the taste of the community. The ritual process is eliminated. This behavior is approved by the palace even by giving freedom to copy and develop procedures (traditions) outside of hegemony. The palace becomes the source of ideas for developing an urbanist tradition, but the pattern of *piwulang lan piweling* (lessons and warnings) refers to the palace. The final product developed by the urbanist group is a new system of ceremonial system.

The hegemony of the palace placed itself in the highest position, while urbanists enter the outer strata group. The stratum of the form is diglossive language consisting of the highest level of Javanese language (*Krama hinggil*), the medium level of the language (*Krama Madya*), and the basic level of the language (*ngoko*) for urbanists. One special language is called a *pustaka hinggil* language, a language register for the king's libraries. This language diglossia shows the typical pattern of Yogyakarta's societal structure.

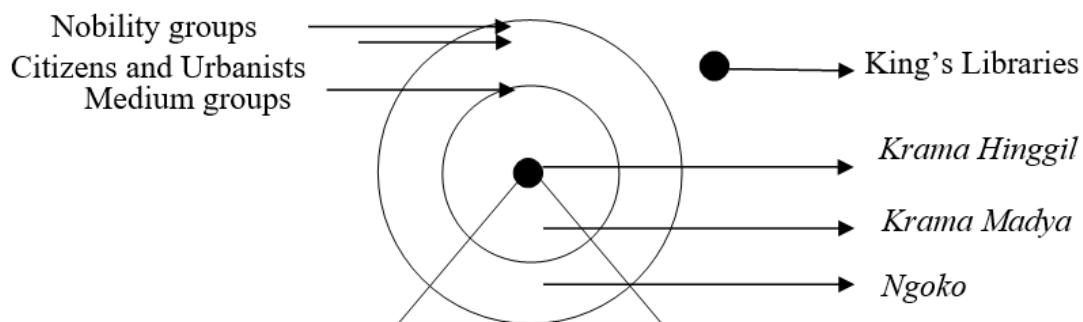


Figure 3: The Scheme of Diglossy Language that shows cultural strata in the societies in Yogyakarta

Krama hinggil for nobility is usually unilaterally applicable, meaning that there is no obligation for the nobles to use the *krama hinggil*. Language obligations are applied to groups toward the upper strata. The lower strata are obliged to speak the *krama madya*, and the upper strata must use *krama hinggil*. The *ngoko* language for the lower groups includes urbanists. The urbanists in Yogyakarta have unique strata of the *Krama hinggil* structure. The urban economy has a background of economic interests and needs; there is a temporary, permanent, and non-permanent urban economy. The urban culture has a background of prestige as part of an *abdi dalem* (the palace's loyal officers) platform in the sultanate palace of Yogyakarta and Puro Pakualaman. The urban education is for students staying there and this status has cultural impacts, the urban politics conditionally aims to gain popularity through social activities, and political culture; the urban belief aims to strengthen spiritual behaviors as religious or spiritual leaders, the urban arts closely connect to local cultures through formal higher education and communities (artists and cultural practitioners), modern and postmodern arts traditions (Pamadhi, 2015, p.59).

The Javanese people possess a cultural hegemony that encompasses the aesthetic expression of ornamentation known as *karawitan*. *Karawitan* follows the principles of *rawit*, *racik*, and *yasa*, with a focus on the arrangement of visual elements such as point, line, plane, shape, and color. The syncretism of Hinduist, Buddhist, and Chinese spiritual beliefs is evident in the symbolic meanings attached to colors like red (representing Brahma), brown (representing the color of immortality), blue (representing Ciwa), and white (representing Vishnu).

Karawitan incorporates basic motifs derived from flora, fauna, figural representations, and geometry. Fauna motifs feature lizards, crocodiles, reptiles, and human depictions, while flora motifs symbolize the balance between human culture and nature, such as creeping plants (symbolizing fertility), roses (symbolizing beauty), and pineapples (representing hidden sweetness). Geometric motifs establish a vertical connection with God and a horizontal relationship between humans.

Intertextuality is employed through structured and measurable arrangements of motifs, both symmetric and asymmetric, as well as homologous compositions that make interpretation challenging. The use of chronograms and homologous sentences adds further complexity. The homologous part of *candrasengkala*, despite having the same visual elements, conveys different meanings. For example, the principle "*Sirna Ilang Kertaning Bumi*" represents the collapse of the Great Kingdom in 1400. (<https://engineer.co/2011/09/14/candrasengkala-ii-watak-bilangan-angka/>).

In the context of art as a language, ornament also functions as a visual language, because in Javanese culture there is a tradition to express an idea, expression, and moral message containing learning about noble morals through ornamentation. The visual narrative of ornaments was mainly influenced by cultural acculturation in Javanese society, while noble character-based learning was the result of religious syncretism and belief in Javanese culture.

CONCLUSION

The cultural acculturation and religious syncretism in Javanese society have shaped the visual narrative of ornaments, which serves as a visual language expressing ideas, expressions, and moral messages. The noble character-based learning embedded in Javanese culture is reflected through ornamentation. Overall, the decorative figural art and ornamentation in Javanese culture are not only visually captivating but also convey profound cultural, religious, and moral meanings, making them an essential part of the Javanese cultural heritage.

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