



# TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE OF CREATING *TATAHAN AJEG* ON *WAYANG KULIT* FOR BEGINNER

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## **Abstact**

This research aims to provide technical knowledge for *penatah* parchment to beginners to produce *tatahan ajeg*, which means constant or consistent through qualitative research with artistic research methods that discuss practice-based research that produces technical knowledge and understanding of *tatahan* (inlay) to produce inlays that are considered good. It is hoped that the technical knowledge of creating *tatahan ajeg* will tell that several things need to be considered apart from continuous practice. It should be noted that the inlay results in the form of shadow puppets greatly influence the quality of beauty and aura of the *wayang* characters created. Apart from that, a good inlay will make the stitching process *menyungging*.

Keyword: technical knowledge, *tatahan ajeg*, beginner instructor

## **INTRODUCTION**

*Wayang*, an authentic Indonesian performing art, has flourished significantly on the islands of Java and Bali. Its cultural roots are deeply intertwined with Javanese and Hindu traditions. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, recognized *wayang* as an illustrious Indonesian shadow puppetry performance and an invaluable intangible cultural heritage masterpiece in the field of oral storytelling on November 7, 2003. However, *wayang* in Indonesia possess unique styles and characteristics, making them original Indonesian masterpieces. It was for this reason that UNESCO included *wayang* in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural

Heritage of Humanity in 2003. There is no substantial evidence indicating the existence of *wayang* before the spread of Hinduism in South Asia (Sri Seventi Pujiastuti, et al., 2015). Yogyakarta, as the sole special region on Java, has steadfastly preserved its rich arts and cultural center, the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, safeguarding *wayang kulit* as both an artwork and a cultural artifact. The popularity of *wayang purwa* is attributed to the patronage of the upper echelons of society, including royalty, nobility, government officials, and regional leaders (Dr. Sunarto, R. Bima Slamet Raharja, Sagio: 7, 2023). Unsurprisingly, that *wayang purwa* continues to be cherished within the Kraton Ngayogyakarta, with a collection amassed by successive Sultans of Yogyakarta, currently totaling seven sets of wayang as reported by Sagio, a royal servant of the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, during an interview.

Sagio, in addition to his role as a royal servant, is a renowned *tatah sungging* craftsman in Gendeng, Bangunjiwo, and is involved in teaching at the Akademi Komunitas Negeri Seni dan Budaya Yogyakarta. He served as a key informant for this study. This research was initiated due to the difficulties encountered by students in commencing their *tatah kulit* studies. For those unfamiliar with the tools and techniques of carving, the initial steps can be perplexing. Carving is a specialized skill not commonly taught, as not everyone possesses the interest or necessity for such expertise. This study aims to provide guidance and instructions to students, the general public, and foreign nationals who are new to the technique of *wayang kulit* carving, particularly the types of carvings found in Yogyakarta-style *wayang kulit*.

This research aims to provide guidelines and a systematic approach to creating consistent carvings for *wayang kulit* and dance accessories. Employing a qualitative research methodology with an artistic approach, this study focuses on the creative process of artists. The research is based on in-depth interviews with practitioners and craftsman, *wayang kulit* enthusiasts, researchers, and the researcher's observations. This study examines the technical knowledge required for carving parchment to produce consistent and high-quality carvings. It is particularly valuable for beginners seeking to learn parchment carving. Although several books discuss parchment carving and

engraving techniques, there remains a need for more specific guidance for novices or those unfamiliar with the craft, especially for those who have never observed a skilled craftsman at work.

## Research Method

This qualitative descriptive study employed an artistic research methodology whereby findings were derived from practice-based research. As defined by Guntur (2016), this approach constitutes an original investigation undertaken to generate new knowledge, a portion of which is acquired through practical engagement and the outcomes of such practice. Data for this study were collected through interviews and participant observation of practitioners specializing in *tatah sungging*, particularly those involved in the creation of *wayang kulit* and accessories for Yogyakarta-style dance. Additional informants included researchers and enthusiasts of the Yogyakarta *wayang kulit* tradition. Within the context of this research, knowledge is conceptualized as a skill, which Guntur (2016) terms “technical know-how” – an understanding of how to produce, enact, and execute.

## Results and Discussion

Yogyakarta, renowned as “*kota pelajar*”, or a city of students, has also emerged as a significant tourism destination, fostering the growth and preservation of arts and culture, notably *wayang*. As Priyanto noted, one such niche cultural tourism is Javanese *wayang kulit*. *Wayang kulit* is a traditional Indonesian art form predominantly found in Java. The term ‘*wayang*’ is derived from ‘Ma Hyang’, signifying a spiritual essence, deity, or God. Alternatively, it is interpreted as a Javanese word meaning shadow, as spectators often view the performance from behind the *kelir* (screen), observing only the silhouettes. The UNESCO, on November 7, 2003, recognized *wayang kulit* as a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity, acknowledging its exceptional narrative storytelling and invaluable cultural legacy (2017). As a skill that concurrently preserves the cultural arts of Yogyakarta, it is essential to impart the understanding that these

abilities can be refined through resolute and sincere intent, consistent practice, and unwavering determination, akin to the Javanese philosophy: *nyawiji, greged, sengguh, ora mingkuh*, as directly conveyed by Sagio. *Nyawiji* signifies undivided focus, *greged* embodies fervent enthusiasm, *sengguh* represents self-assurance, and *ora mingkuh* denotes responsibility and consistency. An entrepreneurial spirit, fundamentally rooted in a love for one's work, is indispensable for achieving aspirations.

Consequently, the process of inlaying is paramount to the achievement of a successful and high-quality inlaid product. The resulting inlays serve as both substitutes and delineations between the constituent parts of the *wayang kulit body*. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of *wayang kulit* encompasses not merely an appreciation for the final product but also a profound knowledge of inlay techniques. While the subsequent technique of *sungging* is undeniably significant, its execution is contingent upon the successful completion of the inlay process.

### **The Process and Techniques of Parchment Carving for Wayang Kulit**

The creation of a *wayang* begins with the process of tracing a pre-existing *wayang* onto parchment. Before *ngeblat*, the craftsman must carefully observe the completed piece, replicating the existing lines using a sharp-pointed tool such as a drawing pen or a sharpened pencil. Adequate lighting is crucial at this stage, as it allows for clear visibility without glare. Next, the outlines are incised using a carving tool or a medium-sized sewing needle embedded in a wooden twig. The next step involves cutting out the external parts of the *wayang* using a carving tool along the incised lines. The necessary tools for this stage include a wooden workbench, a wooden mallet, and a set of 30-36 carving tools preferably made from recycled motorcycle shock absorbers, as they have a higher proportion of steel, making them stronger and less prone to warping. The carving tool is held with the sharp end facing downwards, while the right hand wields the wooden mallet. The parchment is placed on the workbench and weighted down with a metal object. The right elbow is positioned at a right angle, while the left pinky finger rests on the bottom end of the carving tool to prevent it from slipping and to aid in its control. The middle

and index fingers are used to lift or move the carving tool, while the thumb controls its circular or curved movements. The process concludes with the carving of the internal details of the *wayang*.



Picture 1. Inlaying leather on the table.  
(documentation Junende, 2024)

As depicted in the image above, the craftsman is seated on a chair with carving tools arranged on a table. This posture contrasts with the more traditional seated position on a mat or floor, as illustrated below.



Picture 2. Inlaying without table  
(documentation <https://tatahsungging.wordpress.com/produk/proses-pembuatan/>)

From the comparison of the two images, it is evident that there are slight variations in the positioning of the right hand holding the hammer. This variation is contingent upon the individual habits of each craftsman and does not compromise the quality of the inlay results. The process of inlaying the interior of the *wayang* is a critical aspect of the craftsmanship, and it requires the craftsman or inker to possess substantial experience with the forms and types of inlay used in puppet construction. According to Sagio and Samsugi's book *Wayang Kulit Gagrag Ngayogyakarta: Morphology, Inlay, Sunggingan, and Manufacturing Techniques*, there are eleven primary types of inlay motifs, each with numerous variations and combinations. The efficacy of the inlaying process is significantly influenced by the sharpness of the inlaying tool (chisel). Proper sharpening of the inlaying tool is crucial yet often overlooked, typically due to insufficient knowledge regarding the required sharpness. Sagio recommends a practical method for testing the sharpness of the tool: by scratching the skin with the tip of the tool positioned at a 45-degree angle. If the tool remains in motion, it indicates that it is not sharp. Conversely, if the tool adheres directly to the skin, it is indicative of sufficient sharpness.

The next thing to consider is the shape and size of the inlay and its use. Beginner inlays are usually still groping while guessing because they are not *titen* yet (memorized). What can be done is to make a special inlay tool/storage area, such as a wallet that is sorted into several parts specifically for certain inlay tools according to their function and size. Or by giving paint on the upper part of the inlay tool using a certain color code. Because it is quite difficult for beginners to memorize and determine the use of inlay tools without reading a book. Besides tools, the next important thing is focus and psychology or mood conditions at that time. According to Sagio, psychological conditions affect the results of the inlay. He often pays attention, because he has been a long time and memorized the character of his students' inlay, he understands how to treat his students. As he said, when his students experience problems at home, the focus becomes divided. On the one hand he had to finish his inlay, on the other hand he had to go home immediately. The results of the inlay will not as good as expected.

Many factors influence the quality of the inlay, some of them are mentioned above. But there is another important factor, which is knowledge of the correct inlay technique. There is a principle that the inlay is 1:2, 1 for the skin left, 2 for the skin lost. To be able to understand the meaning of this principle, inlayers need sensitivity and sensitivity and observe the results of the inlay.




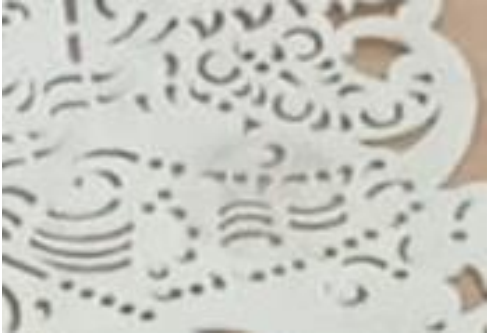
Pic 3. The result from the beginner (not *ajeg* yet)  
(dokumentasi Junende, 2024)



Pic 4. The result from the practitioners (*ajeg*)  
(dokumentasi Warsito, 2022)

The results of the inlay are the results of learning to make inlay for beginners who still try several times to make inlay. From this form, it can be seen that the inlay is not neat, and the size of the inlay has not yet reached *ajeg* (consistent). Sensitivity needs to be honed with repeated practice. In addition, a strong intention, and sincerity in learning are also important. Each type of inlay has its own shape and formation technique. In addition, it is also necessary to understand the sequence of inlays that must be made, especially for inlays that are close together to produce a *tatahan ajeg*. As seen in the number code in the table below.

Table 1. Differences in the results of *tatahan ajeg* and *tatahan belum ajeg* and description of the order of inlaying.

	<b>Kinds of inlay</b>	<b>Description</b>
 <p>Picture of <i>tatahan belum ajeg</i></p>	<p>Mas-masan (orange)</p>	<p>The first inlay</p>
	<p><i>Inten-inten selingan mas-masan</i> (blue)</p>	<p>The <i>mas-masan</i> inlay is made first and is the same size as the <i>mas-masan</i> above it. For the <i>inten-intenan</i>, there is enough space for the hole to be approximately the same size as the <i>mas-masan</i>.</p>
 <p>Sumping with <i>tatahan ajeg</i> (means consistent)</p>	<p><i>Mas-masan</i> (green)</p>	<p>Inlaying the <i>mas-masan</i></p>
	<p><i>Kawatan, srunen</i> semi-circle (yellow)</p>	<p>The <i>srunen</i> inlay adjusts the holes of other inlays. If it does not, then it is not <i>tatahan ajeg</i>.</p>



This form of *tatahan ajeg* is often spoken of by several puppet observers and also practitioners of *wayang* craftsmen. In the book written by Sunarto, who quotes from the writings of Sagio and Samsugi (1991) that when considered from the aspect of the quality of the inlay or the arrangement of inlay elements (combinations) carried out to form leather inlay can be divided into five groups; rough inlay, *agal inlay*, *tatahan kasar*, *tatahan agal*, *tatahan ngrawit*, *tatahan wijang*, *tatahan alus*. When looking at it, the overall quality of the inlay generally refers to a *tatahan ajeg*. If the shape and size of the inlay are the same, it means that the inlay is *tatahan ajeg*, if the whole inlay is the same small, it is also categorized as *tatahan ajeg*. So it can be concluded that the main key inlay quality is *ajeg* (consistent) so that it can be said to be a good inlay result.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the research show that for beginner parchment leather artists, several things need to be considered. To produce a *tatahan ajeg* that is considered good inlay sharp inlay equipment (*landep*) as the main *gaman*/weapon in making inlay. Secondly, pay attention to the technique of holding the inlay equipment, hammer, and the position of the fingers that have their work and functions. After the correct inlay technique has been understood, then the next is to pay attention to the psychological condition must be in good condition and focused. Next is to understand and comprehend the order of the inlay that must be made first on the adjacent inlay. This knowledge of inlaying techniques can be learned continuously through regular practice to increase sensitivity and sensitivity of taste to produce *tatahan ajeg*.

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<https://tatahsungging.wordpress.com/produk/proses-pembuatan/>