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Visual analysis of giant characters in *wayang kulit purwa* based on character traits

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between character traits and visual form in giant characters of *wayang kulit purwa*. The research aims to identify how specific visual elements function as symbolic markers of character traits and to examine whether these visual indicators operate consistently across narrative contexts. This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design using a visual iconographic approach. Primary data consist of visual observations and photographic documentation of selected giant characters, focusing on facial features (eyes, nose, mouth), facial orientation, head posture (*langak*, *longok*, and *tumungkul*), body posture, and ornamentation. Secondary data were obtained from wayang performance scripts, scholarly literature, and expert interviews. Data were analyzed through comparative visual interpretation and contextual narrative analysis. The findings reveal that giant characters can be categorized into four primary character traits: *galak* (fierce), *bengis* (savage), *licik* (cunning), and *kuthuk* (docile). Each category is generally associated with specific combinations of facial features and head postures. However, the study also identifies significant visual contradictions, in which similar facial orientations represent different character traits depending on narrative role and social classification. Notably, triwikrama transformations and lower-status giants such as *Buta Setanan* demonstrate that facial orientation does not function as a fixed moral indicator but as a contextual visual expression shaped by hierarchy and dramaturgical function. This study contributes to *wayang* visual studies by demonstrating that the visual system of giant characters operates as a flexible and relational symbolic framework rather than a rigid typology. By emphasizing visual exceptions and contextual variation, this research extends *wayang* iconographic studies from descriptive classification toward interpretive visual analysis. The findings offer theoretical contributions to visual semiotics in traditional performance arts and practical implications for contemporary character design and cultural preservation.



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1. Introduction

The visual system of *wayang kulit purwa* operates as a symbolic medium through which moral values, social hierarchies, and character identities are communicated. *Wayang* performances embody deep cultural, social, and philosophical values that extend beyond mere entertainment, functioning as a source of life teachings and behavioral norms within society [1], [2]. Among the various figures in *wayang* performances, giant figures (*raksasa*) hold a distinctive position due to their exaggerated physical forms, expressive facial features, and their dominant role as antagonistic characters within the narrative structure. Despite their strong visual presence, academic studies on wayang have predominantly focused on noble or heroic

characters or on broader performative and moral interpretations, while giant figures are often discussed only descriptively or positioned as secondary elements in performance-oriented studies [3]. Consequently, the relationship between the visual characteristics of giant figures and their associated character traits, particularly how facial elements and head postures function as symbolic markers, has not been systematically examined.

This gap highlights the need for a focused visual form analysis that explores how giant figures construct meaning through visual attributes rather than through narrative roles alone [4]. Giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa* are not merely decorative additions but are integral to conveying ethical oppositions and moral teachings, especially the tension between good and evil. Their visual forms exhibit significant variation in size, posture, facial expression, and ornamentation, reflecting differences in temperament, social status, and narrative function. These variations did not emerge arbitrarily but developed alongside the evolution of *wayang kulit purwa* as a performative and visual tradition [5].

Recent studies indicate that contemporary wayang performances are undergoing aesthetic transformation in response to technological development and sociocultural change, requiring continuous adaptation by dalang while maintaining traditional values [6]. This condition reflects the dynamic relationship between tradition, creativity, and audience expectations in contemporary wayang performances. However, while historical studies have documented the development of wayang and its figures chronologically, fewer studies have examined how these visual transformations function symbolically to articulate character traits. Therefore, an analytical approach that prioritizes visual elements such as eyes, nose, mouth (*gusen*), and head posture is necessary to understand the underlying logic of character construction in giant figures within *wayang kulit purwa* [7].

Previous studies on *wayang kulit purwa* have predominantly approached the tradition from historical, performative, literary, and philosophical perspectives. Several recent studies have addressed visual and performative aspects of wayang, including the work of Subiyantoro, Kristiyani, and Wijaya; Anwar, Irfansyah, and Sulistyaningtyas in their article published in *Jurnal Seni Rupa dan Desain* who discussed about adaptation of *wayang kulit* character stylization for virtual reality applications; Wibawa A. B., who discusses wayang within the context of modern performance practices; as well as Putra and Wibowo, who focus on the preservation of *wayang kulit purwa* through contemporary media approaches; and Fibiona *et.al*, in 2024 examines the historical development of *wayang kulit Kedu* as a cultural heritage tradition [8]–[12].

Research on wayang has extensively discussed its narrative structure, dramaturgy, moral teachings, and socio-cultural functions, positioning wayang as a medium of ethical education and cultural transmission. Visual aspects of wayang figures have also been addressed, particularly in relation to stylistic conventions, ornamentation, and general character typologies. However, most visual studies tend to focus on noble, heroic, or divine characters, while giant figures are often treated as supplementary elements or discussed in general terms without detailed analytical frameworks. As a result, the visual characteristics of giant figures are commonly described as exaggerated or monstrous forms, yet their visual logic and symbolic structure remain underexplored.

In particular, limited attention has been given to the systematic relationship between specific visual elements such as facial features, head postures, and body proportions and the character traits attributed to giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa*. Existing studies rarely examine whether visual indicators consistently correspond to moral or psychological traits, or how contextual factors such as narrative roles and social classification influence visual interpretation. This gap is significant, considering that giant figures display considerable visual diversity and include notable exceptions where visual form does not align linearly with character traits. Therefore, this study positions itself within the field of wayang visual studies by focusing on a visual-form analysis of giant figures, aiming to identify patterns, variations, and contradictions in the relationship between visual characteristics and character traits.

By doing so, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of wayang visual symbolism beyond descriptive or chronological accounts. Recent bibliometric studies indicate that research on wayang has increased significantly over the last decade, covering diverse

perspectives such as history, performance, literature, and education [3]. However, despite this growing body of scholarship, visual-iconographic analysis of character construction, particularly in giant figures, remains relatively limited. Responding to this gap, the present study contributes to the field of *wayang* visual studies by proposing a systematic visual-form framework for analyzing giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa*. Rather than treating giant figures merely as exaggerated antagonistic forms, this research demonstrates how specific visual elements such as facial features and head postures function as symbolic markers of character traits within a structured visual system.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the relationship between visual form and character traits is not always linear, as certain giant figures exhibit visual configurations that contradict their narrative roles or moral attributes. By identifying these patterns, variations, and exceptions, this research offers a more nuanced understanding of visual symbolism in *wayang kulit purwa* and extends existing iconographic studies beyond descriptive classification toward interpretive visual analysis. Recent studies have also begun to apply computational approaches to the analysis and preservation of *wayang kulit purwa*, such as image recognition using Vision Transformer models [13]. While these studies demonstrate the potential of digital methods in documenting *wayang* visuals, they primarily focus on technical recognition rather than on interpretive analysis of visual symbolism. Therefore, a qualitative iconographic approach remains necessary to examine how character traits are constructed and communicated through visual form, particularly in giant figures.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using an iconographic approach to examine the visual characteristics of giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa*. A qualitative approach was selected to enable in-depth interpretation of visual forms as cultural texts that communicate symbolic meanings [14], [15]. The analysis was grounded in visual semiotic principles, which view visual elements as structured systems of meaning, and in iconographic interpretation following Panofsky's framework, which emphasizes the relationship between visual form, symbolic meaning, and cultural context [16], [17]. The primary data comprised visual elements of giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa*, including eye shapes, nose forms, mouth (*gusen*), facial colors, head postures (*langak*, *longok*, and *tumungkul*), and body proportions.

These data were obtained through direct observation of giant figures in *wayang*, photographic documentation, and visual examination of selected characters that frequently appear in *wayang* performances. Secondary data were collected from literature sources, including books, peer-reviewed articles, *wayang* performance scripts, and previous studies related to visual and iconographic analysis in *wayang*. The research was conducted through several systematic stages. First, a literature review was undertaken to identify existing classifications of character traits and visual conventions in *wayang kulit purwa*. Second, direct observations were carried out at Ciptaning Studio, focusing on the detailed visual features of giant figures produced and collected by Ki Bambang Suwarno. Third, in-depth interviews were conducted with *dalang* and *wayang* experts, including Ki Bambang Suwarno and Ki Gamblang Carito, to obtain contextual insights into the relationship between visual form, character traits, and narrative roles. Fourth, the collected visual data were organized and categorized based on recurring visual attributes and their associated character traits as identified in *wayang* narratives.

Data analysis was performed using an iconographic analysis framework. Visual elements were systematically identified, classified, and compared across different giant figures to reveal patterns and variations in the representation of character traits. The analysis focused on the relationship between facial features, head postures, and character classifications. Particular attention was given to cases that deviated from conventional visual interpretations, in which similar visual attributes represented different character traits depending on narrative context or social classification. These deviations were analyzed to examine the contextual and dynamic nature of visual symbolism in *wayang kulit purwa*. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-checking results from visual observations,

interview data, and literature sources. Interpretations of visual elements were further validated through expert consultation with *dalang* and wayang practitioners to confirm the consistency between analytical interpretations and practical knowledge. This process strengthened the trustworthiness of the research findings [18].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Variation of Traits in the Giant Figures of *Wayang Kulit Purwa*

Based on field observations, visual documentation, and interviews with wayang practitioners, this study finds that variations in the traits of giant figures (*raksasa*) in *wayang kulit purwa* function as symbolic representations of human behavior and moral disposition. The nature or trait of a giant figure is not determined arbitrarily but can be identified through specific iconographic signs, particularly facial elements such as the eyes, nose, mouth (*gusen*), and the position of the head. Additional attributes, including ornaments and costume elements, further reinforce the visual construction of character identity [19].

Analysis of visual data indicates that, within the context of *wayang kulit purwa*, the traits of giant figures can be grouped into four primary categories: *galak*, *bengis*, *licik*, and *kuthuk*. These categories emerge from recurring visual patterns observed across multiple giant figures in performances and physical puppets, rather than from abstract conceptual classification. Each trait is consistently associated with a particular combination of facial features, head posture, and color application, which together function as visual markers of temperament and narrative role.

The *galak* (fierce) trait is characterized by an upward-facing head position (*langak*), a wide open mouth (*ngablak gusen*) with long and sharp fangs, and *plelengan* eyes with a broad *bedhahan* that produce a glaring impression. A curved (*pelokan*) nose with a sharp tip further strengthens the aggressive visual character. In addition, facial coloring predominantly employs warm tones such as red and pink, which visually reinforce impressions of strength, alertness, and active aggression. These findings are consistent with Sunarto's classification of fierce giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa* and align with principles of color symbolism in visual design [20], [21].

The *bengis* (savage) trait is visually indicated by head positions such as *tumungkul* and *longok*, combined with *ngablak* mouths featuring sharp or uneven teeth, including prominent front fangs. Eye forms commonly include *plelengan* or *kiyipan* with sharp gazes, accompanied by a *pelokan* nose. Facial coloring varies from red and pink to blue or graded combinations. Although the *bengis* trait shares certain visual similarities with *galak*, particularly in mouth and eye forms, the difference in head posture produces a distinct character impression, demonstrating that facial position plays a critical role in differentiating traits.

The *licik* (cunning) trait is associated with deceptive and manipulative behavior and is visually represented through smaller body postures, *kiyer*, *kiyeran*, or *penanggalan* eyes, a *wungkal* nose, and a *mrenghes* mouth. Head positions such as *langak* and *longok* give an impression of defiance and opportunistic behavior. Facial coloring is predominantly red, although in some cases it resembles the natural color of the puppet's body. These visual indicators collectively construct an image of cunning and instability, distinguishing *licik* giants from other trait categories. In contrast, the *kuthuk* trait represents giant figures that are non-aggressive, calm, and often perceived as pitiful.

This trait is visually marked by wide but blank eyes, a *pelokan* nose, and a *ngablak* mouth with blunt teeth and fangs. Facial coloring typically employs cool tones such as blue or colors close to the body's natural hue. As noted by Sunarto, the *kuthuk* trait functions as a visual counterpoint to *galak*, emphasizing restraint rather than aggression. However, subsequent analysis reveals that these visual indicators do not always operate consistently, opening space for exceptions and contextual reinterpretation, which are discussed in the following sections [22]. Fig. 1, Fig. 2, and Fig. 3 illustrate the typological variations in the shapes of eyes, noses, and mouths among giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa*. Fig. 1 displays the eye types of these giant characters [23], [24].

Eye Types in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa			
Belis		Kelipan	
Plolon		Penanggalan	
Kiyipan		Pitelengan	
		Thelengan	

Fig. 1. Eye Types in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa

Fig. 2 shows the nose types of giant characters in Wayang Kulit Purwa.

Nose Types in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa			
Pelokan		Pangotan	
Terongan Kopek		Wungkal Gerang	
Terogan Glathik			

Fig. 2. Nose Types in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa

Fig. 3 shows the mouth type (*gusen*) of the giant character in Wayang Kulit Purwa.

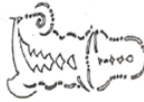
Mouth (<i>Gusen</i>) Types in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa	
	
	

Fig. 3. Mouth (*Gusen*) Types in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa

In *Wayang Kulit Purwa*, giant figures function as visual symbolic manifestations of character traits, expressions, and moral dispositions. Similar to human life, where good and evil coexist in constant opposition at both individual (microcosmic) and universal (macrocosmic) levels, this dualism is visually articulated through the spatial arrangement of characters in wayang performances. Figures associated with truth and virtue are conventionally positioned on the *simpingan kanan* (right side) of the *kelir*, while antagonistic figures, predominantly giant characters occupy the *simpingan kiri* (left side). The persistent presence of giant figures in almost every wayang performance, and their eventual defeat by non-giant knightly characters, reflects a recurring moral narrative: evil is ultimately overcome by good. However, the continual re-emergence of new giant adversaries suggests that evil is not eradicated permanently but reappears in different forms, sometimes with greater intensity.

This pattern underscores the symbolic function of giant figures as representations of enduring moral conflict rather than as fixed embodiments of absolute evil. Visual observations further indicate that the manifestation of giant figures varies significantly in form and proportion. Some giants are depicted with massive bodies, while others appear relatively small. Facial and bodily coloration among giant figures is notably more diverse than that of other character types, and certain figures such as giant spirits (*buta siluman*) or demonic giants (*buta setanan*) display exaggerated forms that deviate from standard wayang proportions. These visual deviations suggest that evil is not confined to a single appearance or social domain but can emerge across different environments, including contexts traditionally associated with

virtue. This ambiguity is exemplified by the figure of Kumbakarna, who is portrayed as loyal to his kingdom and devoted to his people, yet remains aligned with Rahwana, an antagonist opposing Rama. Such cases demonstrate that moral positioning in wayang kulit purwa is complex and cannot be inferred solely from narrative allegiance or visual exaggeration. The variation of traits and visual definitions observed in giant figures is therefore summarized in the following table to clarify recurring patterns and distinctions. The variations in the characters of wayang kulit purwa giants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variation of Character Traits in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa

Trait of Giant Characters	Meaning	Main Visual Signs
<i>Galak</i>	Indicates a character who is alert, aggressive, and wants to or is attacking the opponent.	Face position; <i>langak</i> , with <i>plelengan</i> eyes, <i>pelokan</i> nose, <i>gusen</i> mouth with blunt fangs
<i>Bengis</i>	Indicates an angry and furious character.	Face position: <i>longok</i> , <i>kiyipan</i> eyes and <i>plelengan</i> eyes, <i>pelokan</i> nose, <i>gusen</i> mouth with sharp fangs
<i>Licik</i>	Indicates a character who has evil intentions, is a cheater, and a liar.	Face position: <i>longok</i> , <i>kiyer</i> eyes and <i>penanggalan</i> eyes, <i>wungkal gerang</i> nose, <i>mrenes</i> mouth with fangs on the front.
<i>Khutuk</i>	Indicates a calm, pitiful, and unlucky character.	Face position: <i>langak</i> , <i>plelengan</i> eyes and <i>kelipan</i> eyes, <i>pelokan</i> nose, <i>gusen</i> mouth with blunt canine teeth.

1) Face Position on Giant Figures

In the wayang kulit purwa, there are several types of face positions or head postures known for giant figures, namely *langak* (looking up or *mendongak* in Javanese), *longok* (straight forward), and *tumungkul* (crouching) [20]. The face position or head posture signifies the characteristics of the giant figure with various characteristics or levels of temperament. An explanation of the face position is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Facial Orientation and Head Posture in Giant Figures of Wayang Kulit Purwa

Face Position Type	Explanation	Colossal Figure	Image of a Giant Figure
<i>Langak</i>	The opposite trait shows characteristics that have a sense of impatience, aggressiveness, and greed, characterized by an upward looking face.	Buta Cakil, Sarpakenaka, Wil Katakini, Buta Rambut Geni, Niwatakawaca, several giant demon figures.	 Buta Cakil
<i>Longok</i>	The middle position is shown with a straight face and shows a more neutral trait.	Begawan Bagaspati, Trembaka, Arimbaka, Yayahgriwa, Lembu Sura, Kala Srenggi	 Begawan Bagaspati
<i>Tumungkul</i>	A bowed head indicates that the character is full of responsibility, patient, and not easily frightened. But in giant characters, there are exceptions, namely there are some characters who bow not to indicate the described characteristics, but to show obedience because they are positioned as a low class.	Dewa Amral, Kumbakarna, and several demonic giant figures.	 Dewa Amral

Langak refers to a head posture in which the face is oriented upward or slightly raised. Visual analysis indicates that this posture is commonly associated with characters who display arrogance, aggression, or a sense of superiority over others. In *wayang kulit purwa*, the *langak* head position frequently appears in giant figures and antagonistic characters whose traits correspond to dominance and confrontational behavior. For instance, the giant character *Buta Cakil* is often depicted with a *langak* head position, reinforcing his arrogant, aggressive, and cunning disposition.

Within the narrative structure of wayang performances, the *langak* posture functions as a visual marker of dominance and power, signaling characters who occupy an assertive or oppositional role in the *lakon*. *Longok* denotes a head posture in which the face is oriented straight ahead. This position is generally associated with characters who exhibit balance, restraint, and emotional control. Visual observations show that characters portrayed with wise or authoritative traits such as knights or divine figures are frequently represented with the *longok* head position. In this context, *longok* functions as a visual indicator of stability and composure rather than moral extremity.

Characters with this posture are typically perceived as fair, rational, and trustworthy, reflecting their role as mediators or stabilizing forces within the *wayang* narrative system. *Tumungkul* refers to a head posture in which the face is oriented downward, resembling a bowing gesture. This posture is commonly associated with characters who express humility, contemplation, or psychological tension. In figures such as the Punakawan, *tumungkul* position often conveys submissiveness, modesty, or comedic introspection. However, visual analysis reveals that in giant figures or antagonistic characters, *tumungkul* does not necessarily signify weakness. Instead, it may indicate restrained aggression or latent hostility, suggesting emotional pressure that has not yet been outwardly expressed. Thus, the *tumungkul* head position functions as a complex visual sign, representing humility in some contexts and suppressed anger or internal conflict in others.

2) The Impact of Character Traits on the Visual Form of Giant Figures in Wayang Kulit Purwa

In *wayang kulit purwa*, facial orientation significantly influences body posture and overall visual appearance. For example, in the giant character *Buta Cakil*, the *langak* head position is consistently accompanied by a backward-leaning body posture known as *dhengkeng*. This combination of facial orientation and body posture reinforces the character's aggressive and confrontational disposition. According to Prisandy, *wayang* figures characterized by *thelengan* eyes and a lowered facial orientation (*tumungkul*) are generally associated with *jangkahan* characters possessing large body proportions, such as Bratasena and Gatutkaca [25]. These observations indicate that facial orientation functions not only as an isolated visual element but also as a determinant of bodily posture and proportional emphasis. Facial orientation also plays a role in shaping the perceived traits of *wayang* characters.

A *langak* facial orientation combined with a *dhengkeng* body posture often signifies a "*licik*" (cunning) disposition, as observed in characters such as Dursasana and Rahwana. Conversely, characters associated with virtuous traits, including Yudistira, Rama, and Dewi Sinta, are typically depicted with a lowered or restrained facial orientation, conveying humility and moral restraint. This visual logic aligns with Purwanto's assertion that wayang characters function as representations of human attitudes, traits, and moral behavior within narrative performances [26]. However, visual analysis of giant figures reveals notable exceptions to this general pattern. In several cases, a *langak* facial orientation does not necessarily indicate a "*licik*" trait, and conversely, a *tumungkul* facial orientation may appear in figures expressing anger or latent aggression.

These exceptions are particularly evident in giant figures associated with triwikrama transformations, such as *Bala Srewu* or *Brahala*, which represent incarnations of *Dewa Wisnu*. Although *Dewa Wisnu* is inherently associated with virtuous traits, his *triwikrama* manifestations adopt enlarged facial and bodily forms that convey intimidation and destructive power. In this context, the *tumungkul* facial orientation may symbolize Wisnu's original virtuous nature, while the exaggerated scale and fierce expression communicate anger or cosmic force.

According to an interview with Ki Bambang Suwarno, conducted on 9 July 2025, a similar ambiguity is observed in the visualization of *Buta Setanan*. While this character is generally categorized as possessing a “*licik*” (cunning) trait and is often depicted with a *langak* facial orientation, several visual representations show *Buta Setanan* with a *tumungkul* facial position. In these cases, the lowered facial orientation does not signify goodness but rather indicates a subordinate social status and submission to authority. This is evident in figures such as *Buta Alasan* and *Buta Setanan* depicted as attendants of *Batari Durga* during her presence in *Setragandamayit*.

These examples demonstrate that facial orientation in giant figures does not operate as a fixed indicator of moral character but functions contextually to express social hierarchy, narrative role, and emotional state. Visual representations of *tumungkul* and *langak* facial orientations in *Buta Setanan* are illustrated in the following figure. The following image presents two giant figures from the lower social class, namely *Buta Setanan*: *Buta Setanan Congculi*, depicted with a *tumungkul* facial orientation, and *Buta Setanan Gludhung Pringis*, depicted with a *langak* facial orientation. Both figures are part of the collection of Ki Bambang Suwarno. As can be seen in Fig. 4.

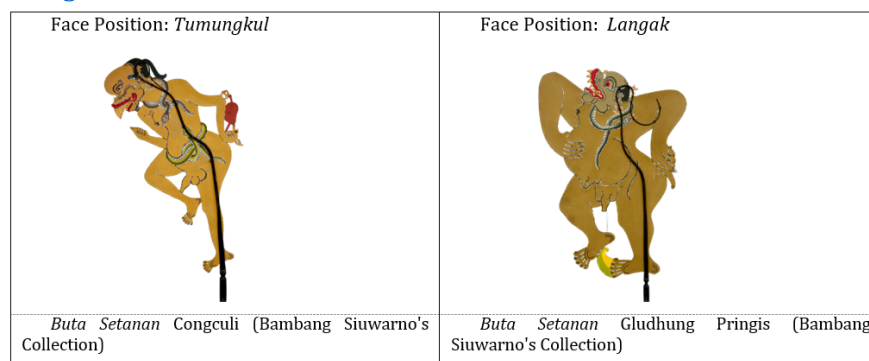


Fig. 4. *Buta Setanan*

The presence of visual and interpretive exceptions among giant figures can be attributed to the diverse narrative backgrounds and social classifications of giants within *wayang kulit purwa* performance scripts. Unlike other wayang characters, giant figures are not represented as a homogeneous group but encompass a wide range of social statuses, from divine to marginal entities. Within this system, giant figures can be classified into five primary groups: divine giants (*dewa* group, including *Batara* and *Batari*), royal giants, brahmana giants (*Begawan*), *ksatria* giants, and lower-status giants, which include *Buta Punggawan*, *Buta Setanan*, and *Buta Kewanan*. One of the most visible distinctions among these groups lies in variations in body posture, ornamentation, and accessory usage, which function as visual indicators of social hierarchy and narrative role. Analysis of this classification reveals significant visual diversity among giant figures in *wayang kulit purwa*. In particular, lower-status giants such as those belonging to the *Buta Punggawan*, *Buta Setanan*, and *Buta Kewanan* groups are often depicted with forms that appear bolder, more exaggerated, and less constrained by conventional wayang proportions.

These figures frequently display extreme facial expressions, unconventional body postures, and eccentric accessories. A similar visual distinctiveness is also evident in divine figures who undergo *triwikrama* transformations, where changes in scale and form produce dramatic and intimidating appearances. Such visual variations are closely associated with the character traits portrayed within the *lakon*. Lower-class giants, including figures from the *Buta Prepat* group such as *Buta Cakil*, *Buta Rambut Geni*, *Buta Terong*, and *Pragalba* as well as *Buta Setanan* and *Buta Kewanan*, exhibit particularly distinctive facial orientations, facial features, body postures, and accessories. These visual characteristics tend to emphasize fearfulness, extremity, and eccentricity. Within *wayang* narratives, such figures are consistently portrayed as antagonists who possess negative traits, ambiguous origins, and who are ultimately defeated by the principal characters. Their repeated narrative fate reinforces their symbolic role as embodiments of disruptive or undesirable qualities.

Widayat introduces the term *Nagri Sabrang* to describe groups of giants whose origins are considered unclear or external to Javanese cultural order [27]. In this context, giants are conceptualized as beings that exist outside normative Javanese values and social structures. This interpretation aligns with Magnis-Suseno's observation that, within Javanese ethical thought, rude and immoral behavior is metaphorically associated with giants, leading to labels such as *durung Jawa* (not yet Javanese) or *ora Jawa* (not Javanese) for individuals who fail to conform to accepted moral conduct [28]. In line with this view, recent narrative studies of wayang texts cited in Mulyono demonstrate that the presence of disruptive characters originating from *sabrang* and/or giant figures constitutes a recurring convention used to generate conflict, thereby reinforcing their position as "external" agents within the narrative world [29].

Consequently, the visually exaggerated and nonconforming forms of these giant figures, often departing from established wayang aesthetic rules, serve as symbolic warnings of behavior that should be avoided. Within wayang performances, these visual and narrative exceptions function as a didactic contrast between good and evil. The symbolic system of wayang consistently employs visual differentiation to communicate moral lessons, where adherence to aesthetic order is associated with virtue, and visual excess or deviation signals moral transgression. Thus, the diverse and unconventional visual forms of giant figures are not merely artistic variations but integral components of wayang's moral pedagogy, reinforcing ethical distinctions through visual symbolism. The findings of this study are consistent with Junaidi's argument that contemporary research positions wayang kulit as a symbolic system for moral education and character formation [30]. However, this study extends previous interpretations by demonstrating that moral values in wayang are not only conveyed through narrative and dialogue but are also systematically embedded in visual structures, particularly through facial orientation, body posture, and the iconographic features of giant figures.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between character traits and visual form in giant figures of wayang kulit purwa through a visual-iconographic analysis. The findings demonstrate that giant characters can be classified into four primary trait categories: *galak* (fierce), *bengis* (savage), *licik* (cunning), and *kuthuk* (docile) each of which is generally associated with specific combinations of facial features, head postures, and visual attributes. In particular, variations in head posture (*langak*, *longok*, and *tumungkul*) play a significant role in shaping the visual expression of character traits. However, this study also reveals that the relationship between character traits and visual form in giant figures is not strictly linear. Several cases demonstrate visual contradictions, where similar facial orientations represent different traits depending on narrative context and social classification. The *triwikrama* manifestations of divine figures illustrate how virtuous characters may adopt intimidating and destructive visual forms, while the case of *Buta Setanan* shows that a *tumungkul* facial orientation does not indicate moral goodness but instead signifies subordinate social status and submission to authority. These findings confirm that facial orientation functions not as a fixed moral indicator but as a contextual visual expression shaped by narrative role, hierarchy, and dramaturgical function. The primary contribution of this research lies in its demonstration that the visual system of giant figures in wayang kulit purwa operates as a flexible and relational symbolic framework rather than a rigid typology. By foregrounding exceptions, contradictions, and contextual variations, this study extends existing wayang iconographic studies beyond descriptive classification toward an interpretive analysis that accounts for moral ambiguity and social structure. This approach contributes theoretically to visual semiotics in traditional performance art and practically to contemporary efforts in character design and cultural preservation. Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis is based on selected giant figures and visual materials from specific performances and collections, which may not fully represent the entire diversity of giant representations across regions and periods. In addition, the study focuses primarily on visual form and does not extensively examine audience reception or performative dynamics, which may further influence character interpretation. Future research may expand this study by incorporating comparative analyses across different wayang traditions, exploring audience

perception of giant visual symbolism, or applying the proposed visual-form framework to contemporary adaptations of *wayang* inspired character design. Such investigations would deepen understanding of the dynamic relationship between visual form, narrative context, and moral meaning in wayang traditions.

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