

Lekesan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Asia Pacific Arts

Journal homepage <http://jurnal.isi-dps.ac.id/index.php/lekesan>

WAYANG GAMBUH AS A REPRESENTATION OF BALINESE CULTURAL VALUES: AN AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE PERFORMING ARTS

I Made Marajaya

Wayang Program, Faculty of Performing Arts, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Bali
Jalan Nusa Indah, Provinsi Bali, Indonesia

imademarajaya@gmail.com

Wayang Gambuh is a form of Balinese shadow puppet theater rich in aesthetic and cultural-philosophical values. This performance has its roots in the Gambuh dance-drama, so the essence of Gambuh is strongly felt in every performance. The aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh are reflected through the elements that form the structure of the performance, such as the narrative, *the visual imagery*, the characterization, and the accompanying music in the form of the Gambuh gamelan. This study aims to analyze the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh as a representation of Balinese cultural values from the perspective of performing arts. As a hybrid of the Gambuh dance-drama, Wayang Gambuh is often perceived as complex and difficult to master by aspiring puppeteers. However, this is not the case. Unlike Wayang Arja, which follows the patterns of Arja dance-drama, Wayang Gambuh retains the structure of traditional wayang kulit performances, though its aesthetic nuances differ due to the accompaniment of Gambuh gamelan. The research findings indicate that Wayang Gambuh follows the structure of traditional wayang kulit performance art, such as Wayang Parwa, in a complete and dynamic manner. The audio-visual components including *vocal performances*, *visual effects*, characterization, and musical accompaniment blend into a symbolic unity that represents the values of harmony, artistry, aesthetics, and spirituality within Balinese society. Wayang Gambuh serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for cultural and spiritual education that strengthens the identity of the Balinese people. This research is expected to open up broader avenues of study for researchers and enthusiasts of traditional art to re-examine the aesthetic elements of Wayang Gambuh, while also encouraging the preservation and development of this art form so that it remains relevant amidst the changing times.

Keywords: Aesthetics of Performing Arts, Balinese Cultural Values, Spirituality and Harmony

Received May 20, 2026; Accepted June 8, 2026; Published June 15, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.31091/lksn.v9i1.3872>

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Pusat Penerbitan LPPM Institut Seni Indonesia Bali.
This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license

INTRODUCTION

Wayang Gambuh is a form of classical Balinese performing art with deep historical roots and is regarded as a highly valuable cultural heritage. Wayang Gambuh is a shadow puppet performance with Pagambuhan elements, evident in its narrative, characters, songs, dialogue, *gestures*, and musical accompaniment. This performance draws from the Panji tales originating in East Java, which were later adapted and developed to fit the Balinese cultural context (Yuliadi, 2013). This is further reinforced by UNESCO's designation of the Panji manuscript as *a Memory of the World* in 2017, affirming that its historical value and cross-cultural adaptation keep this story alive across various regions. Just as in Bali, Wayang Gambuh serves not only as entertainment but also as an educational medium, a means of communication, and a space for expressing the cultural values of Balinese society (Kieven, 2009).

From an etymological perspective, the term Gambuh consists of the word "gam," meaning path (movement), and "bhuh," meaning regent or king. Thus, Gambuh can be interpreted as a way of life or the tales of kings of the past, filled with luxury, joy, romance, sorrow, and warfare. All of this is depicted with great *vividness* (*ngulangunin*), as mentioned in the Panji stories (Marhaeni, 2003; Wahyudi, 2020). In light of this definition, when considered in relation to the art of wayang which derives from the word "wayang" meaning "shadow" Wayang Gambuh can be defined as a wayang kulit performance rooted in the Gambuh dance-drama tradition, encompassing the plot, characterization, and accompanying music.

According to , Wayang Gambuh is essentially a wayang kulit performance that tells the story of Panji, known in Bali as Malat and typically staged within the Gambuh dance drama. Since the plot, character depictions, and musical accompaniment patterns are rooted in the Gambuh dance drama, Wayang Gambuh can be viewed as a form of Gambuh performance realized through the medium of wayang kulit. Although the visual movements of the Gambuh dance cannot be fully transformed into a wayang kulit performance, the fundamental aesthetics remain evident in the musical accompaniment and characterization. Therefore, Wayang Gambuh can be viewed as a hybrid form of the Gambuh dance drama.

Wayang Gambuh is extremely rare in Bali and, to date, can only be found in the village of Batuan, Sukawati Subdistrict, Gianyar Regency. The only dalang still active in performing Wayang Gambuh is I Ketut Wirtawan from Banjar Pekandelan, Sukawati District, Gianyar Regency. He is the last generation to carry on the tradition of Wayang Gambuh; previously, the dalang who performed Wayang Gambuh was I Ketut Rinda (deceased) from Blahbatuh Village, Gianyar Regency. The tradition was subsequently passed down to puppeteer I Made Sidja (deceased) from Bona Village, Gianyar Regency, and puppeteer I Wayan Narta (deceased) from Sukawati Village, Gianyar Regency (Dibia, 2012).

Historically, Wayang Gambuh has served as an important symbol of the cultural ties between Java and Bali, as well as evidence of the rich performing arts traditions of the Indonesian archipelago. It functions not only as a religious ceremony and form of entertainment, but also as a means of moral and spiritual education (Marhaeni, 2003). Thus, Wayang Gambuh is a uniquely Balinese cultural heritage that bridges the aesthetic of Gambuh dance-drama with shadow puppet performances, while preserving the Panji tales from Java. Although it is rarely performed today, its existence remains a crucial testament to the cultural and historical interactions between Bali and Java dating back to the 17th century.

From a performing arts aesthetic perspective, Wayang Gambuh showcases the complexity of elements including: language, *tetikesan* (puppet movements), musical accompaniment, characterization, and stage design (Budiarsa, 2022). Each of these elements does not stand alone but blends to form a harmonious unity, thereby presenting the

performance's aesthetic. This harmony reflects the Balinese cultural philosophy that emphasizes balance between humanity, nature, and spirituality. On this basis, the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh can be understood as a representation of Bali's unique and noble cultural values. However, to this day, Wayang Gambuh has rarely received significant attention or in-depth academic study.

This study employs a performing arts aesthetics perspective to uncover the symbolic meanings embedded within the elements of Wayang Gambuh. Aristotle's classical aesthetic theory on beauty, along with Balinese aesthetic concepts, serves as the analytical framework for understanding the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh. Through this approach, Wayang Gambuh is viewed as a multidimensional performing art that conveys cultural messages through audio-visual forms.

The objective of this study is to describe and analyze the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh as a representation of Balinese cultural values. The research questions address two main issues: how the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh performances are manifested and how cultural meanings are represented within these performances. This study is expected to contribute academically to the development of performing arts research while strengthening efforts to preserve Balinese culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding and describing the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh as a representation of Balinese cultural values (Marhaeni, 2003). Research data were collected through observations of Wayang Gambuh performances presented by dalang I Ketut Wirtawan via YouTube. Through these observations, the researcher was able to directly observe aesthetic elements such as: tetembangan, *tetikesan*, characterization, and accompanying music.

Data collection was also conducted through in-depth interviews with key informants, namely I Ketut Wirtawan, as well as expert informants comprising academics, cultural figures, and community leaders involved in the preservation of Wayang Gambuh. These interviews aimed to explore the symbolic aesthetic meanings of the performance and the cultural values embedded within it. This study also utilized literature reviews from various sources, including books, journals, and articles, to strengthen the theoretical analysis using classical aesthetic frameworks and a Balinese aesthetic approach.

Data analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, analysis, and presentation. The analytical process employed a qualitative descriptive and interpretive approach, utilizing semiotic and hermeneutic methods, as well as the theoretical foundations of classical aesthetics and the Balinese aesthetic approach (Sugiyono, 2017; Sobur, 2009; Bandem, 1996). Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the aesthetics of Wayang Gambuh as a medium for representing the artistic and cultural values of Bali.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Origins of Wayang Gambuh

The term Gambuh was first found in the Candra Sengkala manuscript, which reads: "Sri Udayana liked to invite Javanese people to perform; he unified Javanese and Balinese dance styles by combining them into the Gambuh style, during the year 929 of the Saka calendar." The translation is as follows: Sri Udayana saw the Javanese people coming here and united Javanese and Balinese dance, connecting what is called Gambuh, in the year 929 of the Saka calendar or 1007 CE (Putra, 2025). From the excerpt of the lontar above, it is clear that Gambuh signifies a fusion of Javanese and Balinese dance.

Regarding the presence of Wayang Gambuh in Bali, it is said that the Wayang Gambuh set currently housed in Blahbatuh was a gift from the King of Mengwi, I Gusti Agung Sakti Blambangan. He brought the puppets from Java after conquering the King of Blambangan around 1634 (Bandem, 1996). Another version states that a set of Wayang Gambuh puppets, along with other artistic objects namely a chest of masks and two gongs were brought to Bali after Dalem Watuenggong defeated the Blambangan kingdom in East Java during the 16th century. Based on the above events, this art form has long existed in Bali, dating back to the reign of I Gusti Agung Sakti Blambangan, who had previously been brought by King Mas Sepuh (Mas Wikis) whose real name was Raden Amangkuningrat, a king from Blambangan (now Banyuwangi) who later passed away on Seseh Beach in Bali (Munggu Village, Badung Regency).

Furthermore, another version regarding the origin of Wayang Gambuh has also emerged. It is said that the Blahbatuh region, which during the reign of I Gusti Ngurah Jelantik was still under the rule of the King of Mengwi, had no objection to fulfilling the request to send the wayang from Blambangan to Blahbatuh along with Mpu Kekeran (Pedanda Sakti Kekeran), including its puppeteer named Arya Tega. For this reason, Wayang Gambuh can be said to have been born and developed in Blahbatuh with Arya Tega as its first puppeteer. To this day, this historic wayang is still revered and held sacred at Puri Blahbatuh.

Over time, the art of Wayang Gambuh spread to the regions of Sukawati and Badung. Tjokorda Gede Agung Sukawati of Puri Kaleran Sukawati adopted the form of Blahbatuh's Wayang Gambuh, which was subsequently housed at Pura Penataran Agung Sukawati. The Sukawati puppeteer named I Ambul even studied directly under the puppeteer I Gusti Tega (Arya Tega). After Arya Tega passed away around 1905, his son I Gusti Kabor continued the role as a Wayang Gambuh puppeteer until 1908. Subsequently, the position was passed on to I Gusti Kabor's son, I Gusti Nyoman Pering Tega. However, since around 1915, there have been no more Wayang Gambuh puppeteers in the Blahbatuh area. During the Japanese occupation in 1943, I Ketut Rinda attempted to revive Wayang Gambuh, though the results were not significant. He also trained two puppeteers: I Made Sidja from Bona Village, Gianyar Regency, and I Wayan Narta from Sukawati Village, Gianyar Regency.

Thus, the Wayang Gambuh that still survives today in Batuan Village, Gianyar Regency, is a legacy of the puppeteer I Gusti Nyoman Pering Tega from Blahbatuh Village, Gianyar Regency, who passed away in 1912. After his passing, Wayang Gambuh was left with only its name, having no successors. To commemorate and preserve this art form, the Government of Bali Province, through the Cultural Advisory Council (LISTIBYA), organized a Gambuh workshop in 1974. During this event, the historically significant Wayang Gambuh was revived and performed by the late puppeteer I Ketut Rinda from Blahbatuh Village, Gianyar. Subsequently, at the 1996 Walter Spies Festival, Wayang Gambuh was once again performed by the puppeteer I Wayan Narta (late) from Sukawati Village, Gianyar, at the Wantilan of the Indonesian College of the Arts (now ISI Bali).

To ensure that Wayang Gambuh does not become extinct over time, the versatile artist I Ketut Wirtawan, son of the mask maestro I Ketut Kantor (deceased), who is now 56 years old, has taken on the role of Wayang Gambuh puppeteer since 2000, prompted and guided by the late Mr. I Wayan Narta. Wayang Gambuh can be performed as part of *ngayah* at Pura Kahyangan Tiga in the traditional village of Batuan, at Pura Kawitan, during the *otonan* ceremony for a newborn boy due to *mesesangi* (kaulan) in the village of Lod Tunduh, the three-month ceremony for a male grandchild in Batuan Village, commercial performances to welcome Korean guests, the preservation of Wayang Gambuh at the Cultural House covered by TVRI-Bali (see YouTube), and others (Interview with I Ketut Wirtawan on April 26, 2026). These performance activities aim to reflect the golden age of the ancient Balinese kingdom, when Gambuh dance-drama and Wayang Gambuh served as court theater. Almost every royal palace at that time had a *Bale* Pegambuhan, a venue for Gambuh performances that also

served as the center of Balinese arts and culture (Bandem, 1974) . The differences in the characteristics of Wayang Gambuh and Gambuh drama can be explained through the following table.

Table 1: Differences Between Wayang Gambuh and Dramatari Gambuh.

Aspect	Wayang Gambuh	Gambuh Dance Drama
Medium	Leather puppets	Live dance/drama
Main story	Malat/Panji	Malat/Panji
Language	Kawi Madya and Balinese, translated by the punakawan	Kawi Madya, spoken directly by the dancers
Music Accompaniment	Gambuh Gamelan	Gamelan Gambuh
Performance Venue	Stage	Kalangan
Performance Time	Evening	Evening/Daytime
Audience	Children to adults	Teens to adults

3.2. Aesthetic Elements of Wayang Gambuh

3.2.1. Language

The languages used by the characters in Wayang Gambuh consist of Middle Kawi and Balinese. Middle Kawi is used by the knights, while Balinese is used by the punakawan both when communicating with the knights and among themselves. In conversations and communication between characters, the use of Balinese accounts for 75%, while the use of Kawi accounts for 25%. Why is this so? Because Balinese serves as a translator, an introducer, and a holistic means of communication related to philosophy, social criticism, religion, customs, culture, and other local wisdom (Interview with I Wayan Nardayana on March 26, 2026). The Balinese language used is also highly varied and can be categorized into three levels: Bali *Alus Singgih* for addressing figures of higher status, Bali *Alus Madya* for addressing figures of equal status, and Bali *Alus Sor* used by knights of lower status, while "Bali *kepara*" (colloquial) is used for conversations among servants (Mardana, 2011).

In addition to prose, Wayang Gambuh also uses lyrical prose or semi-rhymed language (*palawakya*). This type of language is used in the recitation of *the Panyahcah* Gambuh. The term *panyahcah* (narration) borrows from Wayang Parwa and the Ramayana and can be interpreted as a prologue (introduction of characters and the story) or *pangelangakara* (scene division). Meanwhile, rhymed language is used in the *patangkalan*, *angkat-angkatan*, *rebong* (romance), and *tetangisan* (sadness) scenes. Thus, various types of tembang can indeed be utilized to enrich the repertoire of tembang language in Wayang Gambuh, though their use must still adhere to the standard terminology within *the wayang tradition*. In the art of wayang, tembang is more commonly referred to as *tetandakan*, which refers to vocal sounds where rhythm and tempo align with the accompanying gamelan. In addition to proficiency in using the language and its varieties, there is an intriguing aspect that makes the language come alive when spoken or sung: adequate rhetorical skill. Without sufficient skill from the puppeteer, a Wayang Kulit performance would feel boring and be abandoned by the audience (Mardana, 2011). In an interview with I Ketut Wirtawan on May 26, 2026, several examples of rhyming verses that can be used in Wayang Gambuh were mentioned. The verses in question are as follows.

1). *Tetandakan patangkalan*

“Bujangga anom kemalingan,
pustaka muang genta ilang,
apan masaning mamuja,
paksi ngelayang den tulupin,
atmancuh apan baya kapegating sih,

*sangkaning karya memangis,
siapa ya den paraning,
tangis anggalud-alud...”*

The meaning in Indonesian is roughly as follows:

A young priest has lost,
his scriptures and bell/bajra,
just as he was about to worship,
like shooting a flying bird,
because of his helpless sorrow,
that is why he weeps,
who can help.

2). *Rebong*

*“Dedari Kendran turunan saking sura laya,
Beber bidak buin pidan gantim melayar,
Rambut panjang dendem alus mangedanin,
Luk penyalin mecadang roko,
Paksi ngelayang noro den tulupin,
Sekar gadung anggrek lan meduri putih.”*

The meaning in Indonesian is roughly as follows:

“Like a Kendran angel descending from heaven,
The chess piece is set; when will it move?
Long, black, silky hair, captivating the hearts of those who see it,
A twisted, winding rattan cane, and a cigarette is also at hand,
Like shooting a flying bird,
Gadung flowers, orchids, and white meduri...”

These verses can be added to or reduced as needed for the story. Without the poetic verses, a wayang performance would lose some of its aesthetic weight. The *patangkalan* (council) scene in Wayang Gambuh is typically filled with these verses. Below is a depiction of the *patangkalan* (council) scene in Wayang Gambuh.



Figure 1. King Terate Bang, Patih Arya, and Togog in a meeting. The characters King Terate Bang and Raden Panji.

(Source: YouTube and Document: Kembalyana)

Figure 1 above depicts a *patangkalan* (council) scene, which is a crucial component of the dramatic structure in Wayang Gambuh performances as well as other forms of wayang kulit theater. In this scene, King Terate Bang is seen facing the Aryas, creating a tense

atmosphere that reflects the dynamics of the conflict in the story. The figure Togog appears to open the conversation with the Arya, acting as a dialogue mediator marking the beginning of the trial process. Beside him are the original King Terate Bang and Raden Panji Inukertapati.

3.2.2. Choreography

As is typical, every traditional Balinese performing art always contains stylized movement components known as dance. In the context of theater, the element of body movement is almost inseparable, and indeed, every character about to enter the stage always performs a dance movement, for example, in arja, topeng, prembon, basur, arja cupak, wayang wong, Ramayana kecak, and others (Bandem, 1996). Similarly, in wayang kulit performances, which always begin with the Kayonan dance, the Delem and Sangut dances, dances during the *rebong* scene, dances during the *ngereh* scene, the *Pangelembar* Sugriwa dance, the *Wanara/Palawaga* dance, and the *Wanara Bala* dance. *Tetikesan* refers to the manipulation and movement of the puppets, encompassing both *wantah* (pure/basic) and *maknawi* (meaningful/interpretative) movements. *Maknawi* movements are aesthetic expressions interpreted as symbolic gestures in the dance (Marajaya, 2025).

Thus, *elements* of Wayang Gambuh can be found in the Kayonan dance scene, the *patangkilan* (court) scene, the *pepeson* scene featuring Demang-Tumenggung, and in the scenes featuring female characters such as Raden Galuh Candra Kirana. The dance movements in Wayang Gambuh do not fully imitate those of the Gambuh dance drama. The dance movements in Wayang Gambuh remain general in nature, imitating the dance movements of existing wayang kulit (shadow puppet) performances. In addition to dance movements, the *tetikesan* also involves *wantah* (pure) movements, such as the characters' walking motions (*lifting and lowering*) and the *siat* (battle) scenes. These two types of *movements* cannot be separated, as they have become a unified whole, weaving harmony within an atmosphere that is beautiful, tense, sad, and joyful (Marajaya, 2015).

From an interview with Gambuh dance artist I Wayan Artawa on May 25, 2026, several types of movements frequently used artistically by puppeteer I Ketut Wirtawan in Gambuh Wayang performances were explained, including: *a. Ngiler*, a movement where the head is tilted to the right and left, then pulled backward, and returned to the front, similar to the movements of Prabu Terate Bang, Patih Arya, Diah Rangkesari, and others; *b. Kidang rebut muring*, where the head is shaken and vibrated like in the Demang and Tumenggung dances; *c. Nyegut*, a movement where the head nods downward; *d. Seledet*, a movement of the eyes to the right and left, but in Wayang Gambuh this can be visualized by moving the puppet's face slightly backward; *e. Nyakup bawa*, a bowing movement, with both palms pressed together; *f. Nabdab gelung*, a hand movement that feels *the bun*; *g. Nuding*, a pointing gesture; *h. Penangkilan*, both arms in a crossed position in front of the chest; *i. Nepuk dada*, the right or left hand placed on the chest.

The types of *tetikesan* described above are highly expressive movements. Meaningful movements are stylized gestures that serve as symbols of a particular expression (Asnawa, 2024). Meaningful movements in Wayang Gambuh can be observed in body posture, hand gestures, and head movements. Hand movements can vary according to the motif or composition of the dance in question, making these movements beautiful and enchanting. The types of *movements* described above constitute the standardized movements of Bali's leather puppet theater. The puppets' movements to the right and left of *the screen*, utilizing the light from the *belencong* lamp, are exceptionally well-executed, making the puppets appear as though they are alive and breathing. Below is an image illustrating the Demang Tumenggung dance in Wayang Gambuh.



Figure 2. The characters Demang and Tumenggung, Kadi-kadian, Diah Rangkesari, Patih Arya

(Source: YouTube and Document: Kembalyana)

From [Figure 2](#) above, it can be seen that the characters on *the screen* are named Tumenggung (top) and Demang (bottom). These two characters are the hallmark of the Gambuh dance-drama. Beside them is the character Kadi-kadian, representing the army of the Terate Bang Kingdom, and in the center is Diah Rangkesari (her name may vary depending on the play). The figure at the very back, named Patih Arya, is none other than the warrior unit of Raden Panji Inukertapati. In the image, the artistic difference between the figures in the shadows and the original figures is clear. Nevertheless, the audience can artistically and aesthetically imagine both the wayang characters being performed and their original forms.

3.2.3. Characterization

The repertoire in Wayang Gambuh performances consists of Panji stories. The puppeteer's voice has a longer, more melodic cadence, with movement patterns that tend to resemble those in the Gambuh dance. The nature and character of Wayang Gambuh can be seen in: 1). Wayang with narrow eyes have noble, gentle hearts, like the characters Raden Inu Kertapati, Raden Panji Anom, and others; 2). Puppets with round eyes have a hot-tempered nature and always speak harshly, like the characters Kadi-kadian and Raden Lasem; and 3). Wayang puppets with wide or large eyes depict a wrathful nature, like that of a giant.

The wayang characters used in Wayang Gambuh consist of the Protagonist (Panji), the Antagonist (the stern regent), the Tritagonist (the curious one, Condong) ([Budiarsa, 2022](#)). Overall, the characters in Wayang Gambuh are: Prabu Terate Bang, Panji (Raden Inu Kertapati), Patih Arya, Kadi-kadian, Demang-Tumenggung, Tan Mundur, Kebo Angun-angun, Katrangan Banyak, Jabung, Togog, Turas, Bayan, Sangit, Semar, Pamurtian, Achintya, Kayonan, Diah Rangkesari, Diah Ratna Ningrat, Bhatara Kala, Singa, Harimau, Ampyak, fire, tree, keris, baturan ([Wicaksana, 2004](#)). The following is a depiction of the battle scene between Prabu Terate Bang and Raden Panji Inu Kertapati.

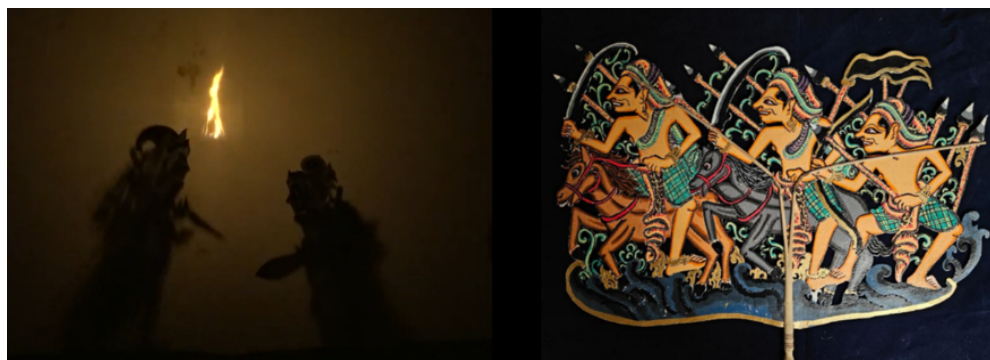


Figure 3. Scene of Prabu Terate Bang Fighting Raden Panji, on the right Wayang Ampyak (*bala-bala*)

(Source: YouTube; Doc. Kembalyana)

Figure 3 above depicts a battle scene between Raden Panji Inukertapati and Prabu Terate Bang. In that battle, Prabu Terate Bang was ultimately defeated by Raden Panji Inukertapati. Beside it, there is also an image of Wayang Ampyak, a type of *rewang* (soldier) in Wayang Parwa (Javanese: *rampogan*). The difference is that in Wayang Ampyak, it is clearly visible that the troops are not only on foot, but some are on horseback, fully equipped with weapons, thus adding a heroic and patriotic impression that reinforces the atmosphere of war in the performance.

3.2.4. Accompaniment

The relationship between musical accompaniment and wayang is inseparable in a performance. From beginning to end, a wayang kulit performance cannot be separated from its accompanying music, which serves to illustrate and support *the dialogue*, songs, battle scenes, and other segments (Marajaya, 2025). Therefore, the accompaniment used in Wayang Gambuh is the Gambuh gamelan, a set of gamelan instruments commonly used to accompany Gambuh dance-dramas. With the use of the Gambuh gamelan, the rhythms played must be adapted to the needs of both the performance structure and the plot structure.

In Wayang Gambuh performances, there are two types of rhythms: free rhythms and accompanying rhythms. The explanations are as follows: 1). Free rhythms consist of the opening rhythm (*petegak*), the closing rhythm (*panyuud*), and illustrative rhythms. *The opening* rhythm serves as a signal marking the start of the performance while drawing the audience's attention to the stage atmosphere. *The closing* rhythm serves as a signal marking the end of the performance. Meanwhile, the illustrative drumming is used to depict the atmosphere of a scene, for example, when the knights and *parekan* (servants) attend a court session or during a *patangkalan* scene; 2). Accompanying music is used to accompany the Kayonan dance, *the Gambuh panyahcah*, *the angkat-angkatan*, the Demang-Tumenggung dance, and battle scenes.

A set of Gambuh gamelan to accompany Wayang Gambuh consists of: a). Four large flutes that serve as the melody; b). A pair of Kendang *Kerumpungan* drums, which serve to control the rhythm; c). *Cengceng Ricik/Kecek*, which serve to bind the melody together; d). *Kajar*, which serves to regulate tempo and rhythm; e). *Klenang*, which serves to harmonize the rhythm; f). *The kempur* serves as an interlude and a closing element for a gending or song; g). *The Kangsi* provides the background for the gending; h). *The kenyir* is used to set the pitch; i). The Gentorag serves to harmonize the rhythm; j). *The Gumanak* serves as a harmonizer between *the Klenang* and *the Kenyir's*; and k). A Rebab serves the same function as a Suling, namely as a melody leader (Interview with I Ketut Wirtawan, April 26, 2026).

The Gambuh gamelan ensemble is not only used to accompany Gambuh dance dramas or Wayang Gambuh, but was also once used to accompany Wayang Parwa by the puppeteer Ida Bagus Ngurah Arnawa (Ida Bagus Buduk) in the 1970s. The aesthetic atmosphere created in Wayang Parwa with Gambuh gamelan accompaniment differs from that of Wayang Gambuh, as each scene is illustrated with *cecantungan* songs, similar to Wayang Cupak performances. Conversely, Wayang Gambuh retains the characteristic songs of the pagambuhan tradition as its defining feature. The names of the musical pieces used in Wayang Gambuh performances are almost the same as those found in Gambuh dance-drama, including: 1). Tabuh Ginanti or Bugari for the opening; 2). Tabuh *Gilak* to accompany the Kayonan dance; 3). Tabuh *Geguntangan* for the *patangkalan* scene; 4). Tabuh *Bapang* to accompany the pepatih; 5). *Bapang Selisir* rhythm for wayang that do not have a standard musical composition; 6). Tabuh *Bebatelan* for the battle scene; and 7). Tabuh *Tembang Ujung*, the closing piece (interview with I Ketut Wirtawan, May 26, 2026).

The accompanying music of Wayang Gambuh plays a crucial role in establishing the emotional and spiritual atmosphere of the characters, ranging from sweet, stern, to humorous personalities. The regular rhythm and distinctive melodies create a sacred atmosphere, allowing the audience to not only enjoy the performance visually but also experience an emotional resonance. Music serves as a bridge between aesthetics and spirituality. In this regard, Cipari (2023) explains that the accompanying music for Wayang Gambuh uses gamelan, rebab, kendang, and suling to support the characters and atmosphere, from sweet scenes to harsh and humorous ones. Below are images of a Wayang Gambuh performance and activities behind *the screen*.



Figure 4. Gambuh Flute Players and Puppeteer I Ketut Wirtawan are Preparing for the Performance

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 4 above shows the scene behind *the screen*. It looked like the players were blowing their large flutes, which were about 90 cm long and 4 cm in diameter. Also visible is puppeteer I Ketut Wirtawan preparing the wayang puppets on both the right and left sides used in the play “Alas Terate Bang”. This performance still uses traditional “*blencong*” lamps for lighting, so the light is not strong enough to illuminate the area where the performers are active, including the quality of the wayang shadows on *the screen*.

3.2.5. Performance Stage

The stage or performance area is an inseparable aesthetic component of Wayang Gambuh. The form of the Wayang Gambuh stage is fundamentally not much different from other wayang kulit performances in Bali. The stage forms an integral part of the apparatus used in Wayang Gambuh (Purnomo & Wahyudhi, 2020). These elements consist of:

1). *The screen* serves as a barrier between the performers and the audience. Aesthetically, *the screen* is used to create shadows, as a surface to rest the puppets on, and to facilitate the puppeteer’s manipulation of the puppets, whether through dance or standard movements (Soegeng & Ghufro, 2016).

2). The lamp serves as both a light source and a tool for projecting the wayang’s shadow onto *the screen*. In Wayang Gambuh, the lighting device used is the traditional *blencong* lamp (a Javanese term). The light from the *blencong* lamp’s wick illuminates *the screen* and creates the wayang’s shadow, making it appear as though it is alive and breathing.

3). *The cepala* is a tool used to strike the kropak or *gedog*. When struck against the side wall whether from the inside or outside this tool produces a sound that serves as a marker or accent for every utterance and movement of the wayang characters. In addition to using *the cepala*, the kropak wall can also be struck or tapped with the right heel, creating dynamic variations in sound. The kropak produces the sounds “tak” and “blak,” which combine to form “tak..blak..tak..blak.” This rhythmic pattern is generally used to regulate the tempo, signal the start or stop of the accompanying percussion, and mark conversations between characters.

The *clapping* sound is one of the main distinctive features in both Wayang Kulit and Wayang Gambuh performances (Sutrisno, 2012).

3.3. Aesthetic Analysis of Wayang Gambuh

In the context of the aesthetic analysis of Wayang Gambuh, the researcher combines Aristotle's classical aesthetic theory with Balinese aesthetic concepts. Aristotle's classical aesthetic theory emphasizes dramatic function through elements such as diction, character, music, and *spectacle*, whereas Balinese aesthetics emphasize harmony, spirituality, and the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy, which connects humans, nature, and God. By combining these two frameworks, the aesthetic analysis of Wayang Gambuh becomes more comprehensive, encompassing both the universal aspects of performing arts and the local cultural values of Bali.

3.3.1. Language

The use of language in Wayang Gambuh, whether in the form of dialogue or chanting, is analyzed as part of diction and thought according to Aristotle. The dramatic text of Wayang Gambuh is often poetic, filled with verses. The language used contains symbols and moral meanings, consistent with Aristotle's concept of diction and thought in theatrical art. As a classical Balinese art form, Wayang Gambuh employs Kawi Madya language in the forms of *gancaran* and *tetembangan*. This language serves as a crucial element in the drama, reinforcing characters and atmosphere. Gambuh is a Javanese-language poem containing life advice, with a specific metrical structure. This indicates that the *tetembangan* in Wayang Gambuh is not merely entertainment but part of philosophical thought.

In relation to Wayang Gambuh, linguistic elements serve to convey the plot and dramatic messages. From a Balinese aesthetic perspective, language is not merely communicative but also conveys *aesthetic* and spiritual values. Thus, the chanted verses act as a medium connecting humans with the sacred dimension, endowing Wayang Gambuh's language with symbolic depth that transcends its narrative function. This shows that songs in Wayang Gambuh are not merely entertainment, but part of philosophical thought (Budiarsa, 2017; Kusuma, 2023).

3.3.2. Impression

The elements of *visual impact* in Wayang Gambuh can be understood as a *spectacle* within the framework of Aristotelian aesthetics, which emphasizes visual expression and dramatic appeal. However, in Balinese aesthetics, the movements of the puppets in the form of dance must fulfill three principles: *wiraga* (precision of movement), *wirasa* (emotional expression), and *wirama* (rhythmic harmony). The movements of the puppets not only reinforce the dramatic structure of the Wayang Gambuh performance but also serve as cosmological symbols reflecting the harmony between humanity, nature, and spirituality.

Furthermore, *the movements* in Wayang Gambuh can be viewed as a transcendental medium connecting the profane world with the sacred world. Every measured and deeply felt movement is not merely an aesthetic expression of the wayang's physical movements but also a representation of the philosophy of cosmic balance. Thus, *tetikesan* presents an aesthetic dimension that unites dramatic, ethical, and spiritual aspects, making Wayang Gambuh a classical wayang art form rich in philosophical and religious meaning.

3.3.3. Characterization

The elements of characterization in Wayang Gambuh are analyzed as characters through Aristotle's framework of thought, which determines conflict and plot. In the context of Balinese aesthetics, each character not only functions dramatically, but also as a symbol of morality and cosmology. The three character traits in Wayang Gambuh, namely protagonist, antagonist, and tritagonist, reflect the balance of Balinese cultural values, so the characterization in Wayang Gambuh presents a deep ethical and philosophical dimension

(Budiarsa, 2022). Furthermore, the characterization in Wayang Gambuh also illustrates the dialectic between the value of *rwa bhineda* (duality) and the concept of cosmic harmony. The protagonist embodies the value of dharma, the antagonist represents adharma, while the tritagonist serves as a mediator maintaining balance. Thus, the character structure not only builds a dramatic narrative but also serves as a medium for the Balinese community's philosophical reflection on order, balance, and morality.

3.3.4. Accompaniment

The musical accompaniment in Wayang Gambuh plays a very important role; it is not merely a backdrop but also serves to support the dramatic atmosphere. From an Aristotelian perspective, the musical accompaniment in Wayang Gambuh functions to support the emotional atmosphere and rhythm of the performance (Bandem, 1996). From a Balinese aesthetic perspective, the accompanying music acts as a unifying and connecting element among the various components, creating emotional and spiritual harmony. The accompanying music of Wayang Gambuh not only reinforces the dramatic structure of the play but also introduces aesthetic nuances and entertainment that blend seamlessly with the language and movements of the puppets.

In Wayang Gambuh, the accompanying music has three primary functional aspects. *First*, the dramaturgical function, wherein the Gambuh gamelan and long flute create a subtle atmosphere that supports the emotional expression of each scene. The accompaniment does not merely serve as background music but also signals scene changes, the intensity of conflict, and the presence of specific characters. *Second*, the function of integration with movement: the music acts as a rhythmic guide for *the performance*, where the protagonist's gentle movements are accompanied by soft, lyrical tones, while the antagonist is accompanied by harsher, more assertive music. *Third*, the function of symbolic aesthetics: the distinctive sound of the long flute creates a sacred and classical impression, affirming that Gambuh is not merely entertainment but also a cultural expression rich in spiritual values (Nafitasari, 2024).

3.3.5. Stage

The stage elements and apparatus in Wayang Gambuh can be understood as a *spectacle* within Aristotle's framework of thought, which can enhance the aesthetic experience through spatial arrangement and visualization (Aristotle, 2008). In Balinese aesthetic concepts, the form of the Wayang Gambuh stage is specifically designed and viewed as a sacred space that is integrated with ritual aspects, not merely a visual medium or a stage for entertainment. The grand and festive stage design and apparatus in Wayang Gambuh can support dramatic elements while reinforcing the spiritual atmosphere of the performance. Furthermore, the Wayang Gambuh stage can be understood as a representation of the cosmos, where every element of spatial arrangement, decoration, and apparatus serves not only an aesthetic function but also a symbolic one. Thus, the Wayang Gambuh stage serves as a medium connecting the human world with the spiritual realm, offering an aesthetic experience that unites visual, dramatic, and religious dimensions. This underscores that Wayang Gambuh is not merely a performing art but also a cultural ritual that reflects the Balinese people's worldview regarding harmony and sacredness.

Based on the above analysis, it is evident that Wayang Gambuh presents a complex and harmonious performance aesthetic. Aristotle's theory helps us understand the dramatic structure, while Balinese aesthetics emphasize spiritual and cosmological values. The combination of the two yields a comprehensive understanding that Wayang Gambuh is not merely a dramatic performing art but also a medium for representing the unique and noble cultural values of Bali. To reinforce and clarify the results of the analysis, they can be presented in a table as follows.

Table 2. Aesthetic Analysis of Wayang Gambuh

Aesthetic Elements	Aristotle (Poetics)	Balinese Aesthetics	Evaluation Indicators	Analysis Results
Language (prose & poetry)	<i>Diction and thought:</i> beauty of language, clarity of meaning, power of the message.	<i>Feeling:</i> language as a spiritual medium and cultural value.	-Clarity of narrative; -Beauty of the verses; -Depth of symbolic meaning; -The presence of spiritual values.	The spoken language conveys the plot clearly, while the songs present musical beauty. Language serves not only a communicative function but also as a means of connecting people with the socio-cultural dimensions of Bali.
Wayang movements (tetikesan)	<i>Spectacle:</i> visual expression, dramatic appeal.	<i>Wiraga, wirasa, wirama:</i> precision of movement, emotional expression, rhythmic harmony.	-Precision of movement techniques; -Emotional expression; -Harmony with music; -Symbolism of movement.	Wayang movements are performed with <i>balanced</i> technique, in harmony with the accompanying music. The movements not only reinforce the dramatic structure but also serve as cosmological symbols reflecting the balance between humanity, nature, and spirituality.
Characterization (protagonist, antagonist, tritagonist)	Characters; the roles of characters in the conflict and the development of the story.	Moral and cosmological symbols, character balance.	Clarity of character; Role in the conflict; Representation of moral values; Cosmological symbols.	Characterization in Wayang Gambuh showcases the dynamics of conflict between protagonists, antagonists, and tritagonists. However, characters also function as moral and cosmological symbols, reflecting the balance of Balinese cultural values.
Accompaniment	Music: supports the emotional atmosphere and the rhythmic “ ” of the performance.	Emotional and spiritual harmony; the bond between elements.	- Synchronization with movement; -Ability to create an atmosphere; -Harmony with language; -The spiritual value of music.	The accompanying music enhances the dramatic atmosphere and conveys a spiritual nuance. The musical accompaniment blends with language and movement, creating a distinctive emotional harmony within Balinese aesthetics.
Stage & apparatus	<i>Spectacle:</i> spatial arrangement, visual elements, dramatic effects.	-Sacred space; part of the ritual and -the balance between the natural and spiritual realms.	-Stage design; -Visual function; -Sacred atmosphere; -Integration with other elements.	- Stage design - Visual function - Sacred atmosphere - Integration with other elements.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that Wayang Gambuh is a complex performing art that integrates various aesthetic elements such as language (both in the form of spoken dialogue and chanting), *movement* (both in the form of pure movement/gestures and symbolic/dance-like movements), characterization, musical accompaniment, and the stage along with its apparatus. Analysis using Aristotle's classical aesthetic theory emphasizes dramatic function and performance structure, while Balinese aesthetic concepts place greater emphasis on harmony, spirituality, and the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*.

Language in Wayang Gambuh serves not only as a means of dramatic communication but also as a spiritual medium that evokes a profound sense of beauty. The movements of the puppets serve as a crucial element for conveying dramatic expression as well as cosmological symbols reflecting the balance between humanity, nature, and the Creator. Characterization presents the dynamics of conflict alongside symbols of Balinese cultural morality, while the musical accompaniment reinforces the emotional and spiritual atmosphere. The stage also functions as a sacred space integrated with ritual, so that the entire performance offers an experience that is both aesthetic and religious.

Thus, Wayang Gambuh can be understood as a performing art that is not only aesthetically beautiful but also noble as a representation of Balinese cultural values. The integration of Aristotelian analysis and Balinese aesthetics yields a comprehensive understanding that Wayang Gambuh is a medium connecting universal dramatic dimensions with unique local values, thereby warranting greater attention in both academic research and cultural preservation.

The findings of this research are expected to provide a platform for researchers and enthusiasts of traditional arts to explore and revive the aesthetic elements of Wayang Gambuh from a performing arts perspective. Currently, Wayang Gambuh can only be found in Batuan Village, Gianyar Regency, as the primary icon of Gambuh. However, in the future, it is hoped that this art form can spread to various other regions in Bali, so that it not only survives as a local cultural heritage but also emerges as a high-value, relevant, and respected performance by the millennial generation. Thus, Wayang Gambuh has the potential to serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, while enriching the repertoire of Balinese performing arts in the era of globalization.

REFERENCE

- Aristotle. (2008). *Poetics (Translated by R. Bambang Sugiharto)*. Bandung: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Asnawa, I. K. G. (2024) *The Charm of Balinese Dance: Understanding the Meaning and Philosophy Behind the Movements*. Denpasar: Bali Museum.
- Bandem, I. M. (1974). *Balinese Performing Arts: Gambuh, a Project for the Exploration and Development of Balinese Dance*. Denpasar: Department of Education and Culture.
- Bandem, I. M. (1996). *Balinese Aesthetics in the Performing Arts*. Denpasar: BP.
- Bandem, I. M. and Dibia, I. W. (2025). *The Meaning and Philosophy of Dance in Bali: Harmony of Movement, Soul, and Spirituality*, *Bali Dalam Berita*. Available at: <https://balidalamberita.com/makna-dan-filosofi-tari-di-bali-harmoni-gerak-jiwa-dan-spiritualitas/>.
- Budiarsa, A. I. W. (2017) “. *Kalangwan: Journal of Performing Arts*, 3(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.31091/kalangwan.v3i1.157>.
- Budiarsa, I. W. (2022). *Revealing the Aesthetics of Movement and Intertextuality of the Gambuh Batuan Characters*. Available at: <https://www.nusabali.com>.

- Cipari (2023). *Wayang Art: Movement, Music, and Meaning Behind the Scenes*, Cipari.id. Available at: <https://cipari.id>.
- Dibia, I. W. (2012a) *The Vibrancy of* . Denpasar: Arti Foundation.
- Dibia, I. W. (2012b) *The Essence of Balinese Performing Arts*. Denpasar: Bali Mangsi.
- Haryono, T. (2008) “.*Estetika Nusantara: Studies in Traditional Performing Arts*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Kieven, L. (2009). *Following the Cap-figure in Majapahit Temple Reliefs*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kusuma, P. T. H. (2023). *Examples of Gambuh Songs, Along with Their Definitions and Meanings*, DetikEdu. Available at: <https://www.detik.com>.
- Marajaya, I. M. (2015). *Textbook on Wayang Puppetry Aesthetics, Faculty of Performing Arts*. Denpasar: Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Denpasar.
- Marajaya, I. M. (2025). Aesthetic transformations of Balinese Wayang Parwa and Ramayana performances in the global era’, 8(2), pp. 51–65.
- Mardana, I. W. (2011). The Rhetoric of Puppeteer Nardayana’s Speech Variations, Cenk Blonk Shadow Puppet Performance: A Study of the Kumbakarna Lina Play. *Wayang Journal of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Denpasar.*, 10(1), pp. 3–4.
- Marhaeni, N. K. S. (2003). Wayang Gambuh: Its Functions and Performance Structure. *Scientific Journal of Wayang Art. STSI Denpasar*, 2(1).
- Nafitasari, A. (2024). *Gamelan as an Accompaniment to Wayang*. Jejak Persepsi.
- Purnomo, P. J. and Wahyudhi (2020). *Tracing the Footsteps of Gambuh Art in Malay Panji Manuscripts*. Jakarta: National Library of Indonesia.
- Putra, I. W. (2025). *The Aesthetics of Gambuh from a Balinese Cultural Perspective*. Denpasar: Udayana University Press.
- Sobur, A. (2009). *Semiotics of Communication*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Soengeng, A. Y. and Ghufron, A. (2016). *Character-Building Values in Stories/Performances*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Sugiyono (2017). *Quantitative, Qualitative, and R&D Research Methods*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sutrisno, S. (2012). *Wayang Kulit Purwa: An Aesthetic and Symbolic Study*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Wardizal, A. A. (2017). The Art of Gambuh Performance: A Study of Meaning and Cultural Values, *Kalangwan: Journal of Performing Arts*, 3(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.31091/kalangwan.v3i1.161>.
- Wicaksana, I. D. (2004). Astadasaparwa and Kakawin Bharatayudda: As Sources for the Balinese Wayang Kulit Parwa Plays. *Wayang*, 3.
- Yuliadi, K. (2013). From “Arca” to Arja: The Adaptation of Panji in Arja Performances in Bali.’, *Berkala Arkeologi*, 33(1), pp. 1–14. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30883/jba.v33i1.9>.