



***Petulangan* as a Field of Symbolic Production: Aesthetics, Knowledge, and Hierarchy in the Balinese Funerary Architecture**

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Abstract

This article examines the *petulangan* in Balinese cremation ritual (*ngaben*) as a material articulation of power, knowledge, and social distinction. Moving beyond symbolic-descriptive interpretations of ritual architecture, the study positions the *petulangan* as a performative field in which cosmology, hierarchy, and aesthetic production converge. Employing a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in visual ethnography and discourse analysis, fieldwork was conducted in Gianyar, Bali, involving observation, visual documentation, and interviews with *undagi* (traditional architects), priests, and customary leaders. The analysis integrates the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault's power-knowledge nexus and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and symbolic capital. From a Foucauldian perspective, the regulation of iconography, proportion, and ritual procedure constitutes a regime of aesthetic orthodoxy through which cosmological truth is stabilized and spiritual legitimacy is disciplined. The *petulangan* operates as a ritual technology that renders authority visible and socially binding. Through Bourdieu's lens, cremation aesthetics are understood as a visual economy of distinction, wherein economic, cultural, and social capital are converted into symbolic capital. Monumentality, ornamentation, and artisanal refinement function as strategies of prestige, reproducing social hierarchy through sacred art. The study argues that the *petulangan* is not merely an ephemeral funerary structure but an active agent in the materialization of cultural politics. Although contemporary economic transformation and commercialization reshape patterns of patronage, the symbolic grammar of hierarchy and cosmological authority remains resilient. Ultimately, Balinese funerary architecture demonstrates how sacred aesthetics simultaneously honour the deceased and reproduce the social order of the living.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across cultures, funerary architecture has operated not merely as a ritual apparatus but as a material articulation of cosmology, authority, and collective memory. In Bali, the Hindu cremation ritual (*ngaben*) represents a particularly complex convergence of theology,

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aesthetics, and social order. At the centre of this ritual stands the *petulangan*—an animal-shaped cremation bier that functions simultaneously as a spiritual vehicle, sculptural monument, and public display of status. While previous scholarship has illuminated the symbolic and cosmological dimensions of Balinese ritual architecture, the socio-political dynamics embedded in its material form remain insufficiently theorized.

The Balinese Hindu cremation ritual (*ngaben*) is both a deeply spiritual experience and an act of performance that articulates power, identity, and religious cosmology in monumental and ephemeral architecture. At the centre of this ritual is the *petulangan*, a monstrous effigy that often appears as mythic beasts like the *lembu* (bull), *lembu wara* (bull-fish), *gajah mina* (elephant-fish), or *singa ambara* (mythical lion), a vehicle for the deceased and a symbol revealing it to be visible representations of social status and religious knowledge [1]. The form, scale, ornamentation, and craftsmanship of the *petulangan* are carefully wrought to render it a liminal structure at the threshold where aesthetics and ideology meet.

Classic anthropological works have framed Balinese ritual architecture primarily through semantics and cosmology. Geertz [2] interpreted ritual forms as part of a broader “theatre state” in which symbols articulate cosmic order and political authority. Similarly, Eiseman [3] documented the sacred geometry, mythological references, and theological principles governing temple and cremation structures. These studies persuasively demonstrate how orientation, iconography, and spatial hierarchy express the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. However, their interpretive emphasis on symbolic meaning tends to stabilize ritual architecture as a reflection of cosmology rather than interrogating it as a site where power is materially organized and socially negotiated.

Yet, despite its dense visual and symbolic qualities, *petulangan* has been frequently cast down the scholarly ladder to a pole beneath sociological, religious, or ritual analyses. For example, Geertz [2] and Covarrubias foreground the ritualistic and performative dimensions of *ngaben* in their research, but at the same time, they treat the *petulangan* as more instrumental or a side issue rather than an object of aesthetic and political expression. In other words, later works such as Howe [4] or Lansing [5] to some extent still neglect the way in which effigies work visually and their architectural connotations in the overall landscape; instead, often focusing on ritual ecology, elements of caste structure, and religious syncretism.

Subsequent anthropological analyses have drawn attention to the role of ritual in reproducing social differentiation. Lansing [5] highlighted the institutional dimensions of religious coordination and hierarchy, while Hobart [6] emphasized the discursive and performative aspects through which social distinctions are maintained in Balinese contexts. From this perspective, cremation rituals are not solely ontological transitions of the soul but also performative reaffirmations of *desa-kala-patra* (space-time-context) and social rank. The scale, ornamentation, and complexity of ritual structures such as the bade and *petulangan* function as visible indices of genealogical legitimacy, priestly authority, and economic capacity. Death, therefore, becomes a moment of intensified visibility in which hierarchy is aestheticized and publicly naturalized.

Despite these insights, the *petulangan* itself is rarely examined as an artifact through which relations of power and knowledge are enacted. To address this lacuna, this article mobilizes the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Foucault’s [7], [8] formulation of the power-knowledge nexus conceptualizes knowledge not as neutral representation but as embedded within regimes of truth that regulate what is legitimate, orthodox, and authoritative. Applied to ritual architecture, this perspective enables us to read the *petulangan* as a discursive-material practice: its iconographic regulations, caste-

based prescriptions, and ritual authorizations constitute mechanisms through which authority is codified and rendered visible. The effigy does not simply symbolize cosmology; it participates in producing and stabilizing a particular order of truth.

Complementing this approach, Bourdieu's [9], [10] theory of field, habitus, and symbolic capital provides analytical tools to examine how social agents convert economic and cultural resources into publicly recognized prestige. Within the field of Balinese ritual production, families, priests, and master craftsmen (*undagi*) negotiate forms, scale, and ornamentation that materialize accumulated capital. Monumentality, gilded surfaces, and elaborate craftsmanship transform material investment into symbolic distinction. The *petulangan*, in this sense, operates as a site of symbolic production in which hierarchy is not merely inherited but actively reproduced through aesthetic display.

The existing literature on Balinese ritual and architecture, while ethnographically rich, remains largely anchored in symbolic-descriptive models that insufficiently elaborate the theoretical dimensions of power and practice. Titles may invoke knowledge and authority, yet the *petulangan* is seldom analyzed as a technology of power—a material structure through which cosmological legitimacy, social hierarchy, and economic agency intersect. This article addresses that analytical gap by integrating Foucauldian and Bourdieusian perspectives to reconceptualize the *petulangan* as a performative architecture that materializes cultural politics in contemporary Bali.

By situating the *petulangan* at the intersection of ritual art, social stratification, and power-knowledge production, this study contributes to broader debates on religious materiality and the socio-political agency of architecture. Rather than treating funerary aesthetics as static residues of tradition, it argues that they constitute dynamic fields in which authority is negotiated, hierarchy is visualized, and cosmology is continuously re-enacted through form. In doing so, the article positions Balinese funerary architecture within global discussions on how sacred material culture functions as both devotional medium and instrument of social reproduction.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in visual ethnography and discourse analysis. A grounded ethnographic approach was selected because the *petulangan* is not merely an object but a living ritual artwork embedded in social relations, embodied practices, and local knowledge systems. Its meanings cannot be adequately understood through textual analysis alone; they must be observed in situ, during construction, procession, and ceremonial performance where aesthetic decisions, patronage dynamics, and ritual authority become visible. Grounded ethnography allows theory to emerge dialogically from field encounters, ensuring that interpretations remain anchored in lived practice rather than imposed abstraction.

Fieldwork was conducted in Gianyar, Bali, over a three-month period from July to September 2024, coinciding with peak cremation (*ngaben*) seasons. Data collection involved systematic visual documentation, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the design, construction, and ritual authorization of *petulangan*. They included master craftsmen (*undagi*), such as Jro Mangku Undagi Nyoman Artana and I Ketut Budiana, and customary village leadership, represented by Jro Bendesa I Made Parmita. Selection criteria emphasized expertise, ritual authority, and active participation in recent ceremonial events.

The analysis employs the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Foucault's concept of power/knowledge guides the examination of how ritual aesthetics function as regimes of visibility and authority, while Bourdieu's notions of habitus and symbolic capital illuminate how social distinction and cultural legitimacy are reproduced through artistic form. These frameworks serve not as rigid templates but as analytical lenses through which field data are interpreted.

Regarding the use of artificial intelligence, ChatGPT was utilized in a limited capacity for language refinement, translation assistance, and structural editing of academic prose. AI was not used to generate empirical data, fabricate interviews, or construct field observations. All primary data derive from direct fieldwork conducted by the researcher.

Ethical and academic validity were ensured through informed consent from all interviewees, anonymization where requested, transparent documentation of field notes and photographic records, and triangulation between observation, interview testimony, and visual analysis. The research adheres to established qualitative standards of credibility, reflexivity, and methodological transparency, ensuring that interpretations remain accountable to both participants and scholarly rigor.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Petulangan as a Field of Symbolic Production*

In Balinese society, the *petulangan* is not merely a mortuary vehicle that carries the body to the cremation site (*ngaben*); it is an artistic phenomenon in which sculpture, architecture, performance, and theology converge. As a three-dimensional, inhabitable effigy, it transforms animal iconography into monumental ritual art. Its volumetric body, layered ornament, and chromatic intensity situate it within a broader Balinese aesthetic tradition where sacred form is inseparable from social meaning. The *petulangan* thus operates as a symbolic zone of production—an arena in which religious prescriptions, aesthetic conventions, and social hierarchy are translated into visible form.

The process of creating a *petulangan* exemplifies what Pierre Bourdieu [11] conceptualizes as a “field” of cultural production. Within this field, multiple forms of capital—economic resources, ritual knowledge, artisanal mastery, and symbolic prestige—intersect and are negotiated. The object that ultimately appears in the cremation procession is the outcome of layered decisions: iconographic selection, proportional calculation, ornament density, color symbolism, and material investment. Each choice encodes social information while simultaneously intensifying aesthetic impact.

The selection of form—whether bull (*lembu*), lion (*singa*), tiger (*macan*), fish (*wara*), or other mythic creatures is never arbitrary. It is regulated by caste affiliation (*varna*), ritual status, lineage history, and sometimes professional identity. The black bull (*lembu selem*), for instance, is traditionally reserved for the Brahmana caste, symbolizing spiritual purity and the return of the soul toward *moksa*. As scholars such as Fred B. Eiseman Jr. have noted, such iconographic regulation consolidates claims to sacred authority and genealogical legitimacy [3]. The animal body thus becomes a public marker of spiritual rank, visually reiterating social stratification even at the threshold of death and the main offering of aesthetic beauty.

Artistically, the *petulangan* is distinguished by its sculptural dynamism and ornamental density. Carved musculature exaggerates strength and vitality; flared nostrils, gilded horns, and expressive eyes animate the effigy with dramatic presence. Surfaces are layered with gold paper, mirror inlays, textile drapery, and painted motifs in saturated reds, blacks, blues, and luminous gold. These chromatic and textural strategies heighten its theatrical

visibility during procession, transforming it into a radiant mobile monument. The aesthetic excess: its scale, height, and elaborate detailing produce a sensory spectacle that collapses the boundary between sacred architecture and performative stagecraft.

Formally, the variations in shape, proportion, and ornamentation of the *petulangan* have been analysed from a visual arts perspective as representations of aesthetic values embedded within the symbolic structure of the *ngaben* ritual [1]. This study demonstrates that visual elements such as the stylized body of the *lembu*, the use of black and gold coloration, and the density of ornamentation are not merely decorative, but articulate cultural and religious value systems.

In addition to visual-art analyses of *petulangan* forms [1], studies of traditional Balinese architectural ornamentation further enrich the understanding of symbolic production in ritual contexts. Research on the ornaments of Puri Agung Karangasem demonstrates that decorative elements in Balinese architecture are not merely embellishments, but symbolic structures containing cosmological and genealogical meanings [12]. This hermeneutic perspective reveals that traditional aesthetics function as a system of signs connecting space, power, and identity.

Similarly, research on the dominance of *patra punggel* motifs as decorative elements in *wadah* structures in Badung shows how ornament reinforces ritual legitimacy and communal identity [13]. In the context of the *petulangan*, such decorative motifs affirm that cremation architecture constitutes a structured arena of symbolic production.

The production process is collective and ritualized. Master craftsmen (*undagi*) collaborate with priests (*sulinggih*), patrons, and family members. The *undagi* does not simply fabricate; he translates cosmological principles into measurable form, ensuring alignment with scriptural canons and ritual propriety. In this sense, craftsmanship becomes epistemic practice—knowledge materialized. The effigy embodies cosmic order (*panca maha bhuta*), social credentials, and economic investment simultaneously.

For wealthier families, the enlargement and embellishment of the *petulangan* amplify its symbolic capital. Monumental scale and ornamental intensity project honour outward into the public sphere, turning cremation into a performative affirmation of identity. Comparable to the potlatch in anthropological literature, the ceremony redistributes wealth symbolically, reinforcing hierarchy through aesthetic display.

In recent decades, modernization, tourism, and media circulation have further reframed the *petulangan* as both sacred artifact and cultural spectacle. While many rituals remain locally regulated and spiritually grounded, others negotiate broader audiences and economic realities. The symbolic capital of ritual art may convert into economic capital through sponsorship, documentation, and heritage promotion. Yet rather than signaling desacralization, this hybridity reveals the adaptive resilience of Balinese ritual aesthetics.

Ultimately, the *petulangan* is at once object, symbol, and architectural site—a condensed field where spiritual cosmology, artistic practice, caste ideology, and socio-political display converge. Through its sculptural form and spectacular presence, architecture becomes a medium of power: not only honoring the dead, but actively reproducing the cultural order of the living.

3.2. *Petulangan as the Aesthetic Reproduction of Social Hierarchy*

The *petulangan*, while conceived as a spiritual bridge guiding the soul from the earthly realm toward its cosmic origin, simultaneously operates as an aesthetic instrument for reproducing social hierarchy. Emerging within a historically stratified Balinese society

structured by the varna system, royal lineages, and customary regulations (*awig-awig*) recorded in *babad* chronicles, the *petulangan* materializes power through visual aesthetic codes. Hierarchy is not only narrated but sculpted—inscribed into scale, ornament, chromatic choice, and iconographic detail.

Cultural studies on the *ngaben* tradition emphasize that Balinese death rituals are not merely religious practices, but also social mechanisms representing cultural values and social stratification [14]. This perspective reinforces the argument that the aesthetics of the *petulangan* articulate deeply internalized cultural dispositions within Balinese habitus.

Central to the cremation ritual (*ngaben*) is the moment of heightened public visibility. Monumental cremation towers (*bade*), elaborately crafted *petulangan*, and dense offerings (*banten*) transform the ceremony into a total aesthetic environment. As observed by scholars such as Clifford Geertz [2] and Michel Picard [15], such rituals function as arenas of display where religious devotion converges with social evaluation. The visual spectacle—gilded surfaces reflecting sunlight, polychromatic textiles rippling in procession, mirrored fragments multiplying light—creates an atmosphere in which prestige becomes perceptible.

The form, size, and decorative intensity of the *petulangan* operate as aesthetic symbols of rank. High-caste families traditionally commission towering effigies, often three to five meters high, clad in gold paper, mirror mosaics, and densely carved reliefs derived from manuscript *lontar* iconography. The shimmering gold connotes purity and divine radiance; the reflective mirrors suggest cosmic multiplicity; the sculpted musculature and dynamic posture of the animal body evoke authority and vitality. These visual features are not neutral embellishments but indexical signs of lineage, ritual literacy, and economic capacity [16]. In contrast, more modest families typically construct smaller, lighter structures with restrained ornamentation and simplified chromatic palettes—visual cues that subtly articulate differentiated status.

The choreography of production and procession further aestheticizes hierarchy. Members of the *banjar*, high priests (*sulinggih*), village heads (*bendesa*), and master craftsmen (*undagi*) assume spatially and visually distinct roles [17]. Costume, position, and proximity to the sacred centre visually encode rank. The procession itself becomes a moving tableau of social order, where the placement of bodies around the effigy mirrors the stratification embedded in its design.

Lavish ritual expenditure also carries symbolic resonance. The grandeur of the cremation is perceived as a final aesthetic testament to familial honour and moral alignment with dharma. In terms articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, ritual investment transforms economic capital into symbolic capital, making distinction publicly visible at the intersection of sacred and secular spheres. Monumentality thus becomes an aesthetic strategy of power—an amplification of dignity through form.

The pedagogical dimension of these aesthetic hierarchies is equally significant. Through repeated exposure to differential scale, ornament, and spectacle, younger generations internalize the visual grammar of status. The *petulangan* educates through sensorial experience, embedding the “social map” of Bali into collective memory.

Contemporary transformations complicate this order. The rise of tourism economies, urban patronage, and diaspora remittances has enabled emerging middle-class families to emulate previously exclusive forms. Larger effigies, intensified ornament, and hybrid motifs signal aspirations toward elevated prestige. Yet symbolic boundaries persist, often mediated by *desa adat* ‘custom village’ regulations and priestly interpretation. Even amid aesthetic convergence, subtle distinctions in iconography, ritual authorization, and ceremonial scale continue to demarcate hierarchy.

Transformations in cremation ritual structures, including innovations in the *bade* and other ceremonial elements, reveal ongoing negotiations between tradition and modernity within Bali's tourism-driven economy [18]. This phenomenon indicates that ritual aesthetics are not static but continuously reconfigured within a changing field of symbolic production. A study on the adaptation of *ngaben* practices in Banjar Tegal Kauh, Desa Pekraman Pohgading, North Denpasar [19] indicates that technical and structural changes in ritual implementation reflect shifting socio-economic dynamics within the customary village. Nevertheless, the core symbolic framework remains preserved as a source of religious legitimacy and collective identity. These findings support a Bourdieusian reading of hierarchy reproduction through adaptive processes that maintain symbolic boundaries.

Thus, the *petulangan* remains an architecture of hierarchy rendered in aesthetic terms. Through gold, scale, sculptural dynamism, and ritual choreography, it transforms social structure into visible art, continually adapting to new economic conditions while sustaining the visual logic of power inherited from the past.



Figure1. Figures showing Several Types of *Petulangan*, Emphasizing the Aesthetic Richness of Their Decorative Motifs.

[Source: Author's Documentation, 2024]

3.3. *Petulangan* as Operating of Knowledge System and Cultural Archive

In addition to acting as a ritual artifact, the *petulangan* functions as an empirical archive of culturally specific knowledge a kinetic-textual structure that literally impresses, initiates learning processes, and communicates epistemologies encoded in Balinese cosmology, aesthetics, social arrangements, etc. In this regard, the *petulangan* should not be reduced to a temporary funerary structure but an archive that provides materialities from multiple generations of encoded memory, myth, and local micro-epistemologies.

Ancient cosmological schemata, derived from sacred texts such as Lontar Aji Sangkakala, Babad (narrative family's history) and Prasasti (genealogy linkages) literature are normally adopted into the design of the *petulangan*. They describe the tripartite division of the world (tri loka), the harmony between macrocosm and microcosm (bhuana agung and bhuana alit), connected with ancestors, veneration required to survive on towards deliverance from worldly trials (moksa) by fulfilling ritual deeds performed in advance so as it will ensure a proper course for the soul to reach liberation coastline. Their cosmological ideas embodied are practically manifested through the spatial orientation, decoration symbol, and building steps of *petulangan* ([20], [21]).

The construction of a *petulangan* is informed by an elaborate corpus of ritual-technical knowledge conventionally held and transmitted by undagi (traditional architects) and/or sulinggih (high priests). The knowledge of undagi is in measurements based on sacred geometry, proportions derived from body metaphors (tala), and aligned with ritual calendars (wariga). Such mastery neither merely cognitive nor technical but a spiritual one, for it is based on the aesthetics of the spoken and performed word as opposed to remembered or scripted language [22] is that quintessentially subaltern knowledge of mantras, rituals, and narrative structures which suffuse the effigy with symbolic energy.

The *petulangan* as an embodied epistemology, furthermore, reflects a pedagogical sensibility based on an oral-visual mode. Ritual performance and practices, collective memory, craft knowledge knowledge in other words is not a world one reads through text but lives. In this way, each *petulangan* serves as a pedagogical resource and an other-generational practice of situated learning, where the manifestation of tradition becomes embedded not only by observing or assisting but also reflecting upon and internalizing its practical and metaphysical elements. Thus, practices such as the Balinese *ngayah*, religious service-learning in which one gains spiritual merit and skill through community participation, were seen to be virtuous [17].

Also, the iconographic motifs like *naga* (serpent), *kala* (time-devouring demon), or *bawi srenggi* (king wild boar) are encrypted with symbolic narratives derived from the Mahabharata, Ramayana epics, and local folklore. An archive *petulangan* that religiously, historically, aesthetically contains mnemonic devices which refer to cosmological order, moral values, and genealogical continuity [23]. Thus, every effigy is a palimpsest of encoded tradition, reassembling archaic meanings into present-day statements.

In the current era of modernization and digital documentation, however, this embodied archive faces new challenges. While some knowledge has been transcribed into printed manuals or digital formats, much remains tacit and vulnerable to erosion due to the declining number of *undagi* and the increasing commercialization of funerary services. When families outsource the making of *petulangan* to commercial workshops, there is often a dilution of sacred intent and epistemic depth replacing cosmological alignment with visual spectacle [24].

Changes in death rituals during global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate how Balinese families adapt ritual forms without entirely abandoning their symbolic meanings [25]. This adaptation demonstrates both the flexibility and resilience of ritual knowledge as a living cultural archive.

Nevertheless, we can identify emerging modalities of cultural resilience the documentation, revival, and intergenerational transmission of ritual knowledge by Balinese scholars, artists, and ritual practitioners. Some community-led initiatives today include efforts to digitize lontar manuscripts, teach ritual architecture in sekaha (study group) gatherings, and incorporate traditional epistemologies into formal education curricula as well [26].

3.4. Power-Knowledge Nexus and Ritual Control: Aesthetic Symbolic Associations

The manufacture and regulation of *petulangan* in Balinese cremation practices (ngaben) may be interpreted not only as ritual governance but also as an aesthetic regime of symbolic authority. In line with Michel Foucault's formulation of the power-knowledge nexus, discourse does not merely describe ritual norms; it produces them. Within this framework, aesthetic form itself becomes a vehicle of epistemic control. The *petulangan*—whether shaped as *lembu*, *gajah mina*, or other mythic hybrids operates as a codified visual grammar through which cosmological truth is rendered visible, disciplined, and socially binding.

The authority to define this grammar is concentrated in ritual specialists: *sulinggih* (high priests), *undagi* (traditional architects), and textual custodians. Their knowledge is grounded in canonical manuscripts such as the Lontar Dharma Kahuripan, Aji Sangkakala, and various *Tattwa* texts. Although these lontar do not function as aesthetic manuals in the modern sense, they prescribe correct proportions, iconographic attributes, materials, and ritual sequences. The result is an aesthetic orthodoxy. The form of the *petulangan* is not an open field of artistic improvisation but a disciplined embodiment of cosmological order. Proportion symbolizes balance (*rwa bhineda*), elevation signifies transcendence, ornament encodes metaphysical hierarchy, and material selection—wood, bamboo, gilded paper—indexes ritual purity.

Here, aesthetic symbols become moral imperatives. As articulated by a traditional *undagi*: “*Petulangan* must conform with the right model, or else the spirit cannot be revealed.” This statement reveals how beauty is not detached from truth; rather, formal correctness guarantees spiritual efficacy. Deviations are not simply stylistic errors but cosmological risks. The aesthetic surface of the effigy thus materializes what Michel Foucault calls a “regime of truth,” wherein ritual knowledge circulates through authorized visual forms and becomes naturalized as sacred necessity.

This disciplinary structure resonates with Foucault's concept of “disciplinary power,” in which bodies and practices are normalized through subtle mechanisms of surveillance and repetition. In the Balinese cremation context, discipline extends to timing (*dewasa ayu*), spatial alignment, and iconographic fidelity. The community learns, through repetition and embodied participation, what constitutes a “proper” death. Aesthetic conformity becomes a shared horizon of expectation. Through ritual instruction, narrative reiteration, and sensory immersion—color, sound, scale—the *petulangan* educates perception itself.

From a symbolic standpoint, the *petulangan* is a liminal architecture. Its hybrid zoomorphic forms symbolize the soul's passage across ontological thresholds—earthly to celestial, material to immaterial. The soaring height of the effigy references Mount Meru cosmology; gilded surfaces evoke divine radiance; the hollow interior shelters the corporeal remains, signifying containment and release. Thus, the aesthetic body of the effigy becomes a cosmogram: a diagram of the universe translated into ritual architecture. Power operates not through overt coercion but through the internalization of these aesthetic codes as sacred common sense.

Symbolic punishment further sustains this regime. Families who opt for simplified or commercially outsourced effigies without ritual justification may encounter subtle forms of social sanction—shame, diminished prestige, or moral suspicion. The aesthetic reduction of the *petulangan* is read as spiritual negligence. Here, the symbolic economy of honor intersects with ritual form. Authority over interpretation remains largely vested in those with access to lontar literacy, Kawi or Sanskritic education, and temple lineage—predominantly Brahmana elites. They possess what may be termed “legitimate speech,” the capacity to define orthodoxy and, consequently, to regulate aesthetic legitimacy.

Yet this aesthetic-epistemic monopoly is not immune to transformation. Tourism economies, modernization, and expanding literacy have introduced new interpretive actors. Younger Balinese may question hierarchical authority, reinterpret *ngaben* symbolically rather than metaphysically, or adopt cost-efficient adaptations. Nevertheless, the symbolic grammar of the *petulangan* remains remarkably resilient. Deeply sedimented discourse, communal obligation, and inherited cosmology continue to sustain its authority.

Ultimately, the *petulangan* operates simultaneously as architecture, icon, and ritual technology of power. Its aesthetic form crystallizes knowledge; its construction mobilizes authority; its symbolism naturalizes hierarchy. Through the disciplined orchestration of shape, scale, ornament, and material, cosmological order is rendered visible and socially persuasive. In the cremation rite, architecture becomes governance, beauty becomes doctrine, and symbolism becomes the medium through which power reproduces itself.

3.5. Bourdieu's Habitus, Symbolic Capital, and the Visualization of Aristocratic Distinction

If the previous section demonstrates how ritual form is regulated through a Foucauldian regime of truth, this section shows how that form becomes a visual economy of distinction in the sense articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. In *Distinction* [9], Bourdieu argues that aesthetic choices are never innocent; they are structured expressions of social position. Within the Balinese cremation ritual, the *petulangan* becomes precisely such a structured expression—a visualization of capital translated into sacred art.

The sponsorship of lavish *petulangan* is therefore not reducible to religious obligation. It constitutes a strategic act of class inscription within a hierarchically ordered social space. Through scale, ornamentation, material refinement, and iconographic complexity, aristocratic and economically affluent families transform economic capital into symbolic capital. Monumental height signals transcendence and power; gilded surfaces refract divine luminosity; elaborate carvings referencing lontar cosmology index scriptural literacy and ritual authority. The effigy thus becomes a visible condensation of resources—financial, cultural, genealogical—rendered aesthetic.

In this sense, capital is not merely possessed; it is staged. The *petulangan* functions as a theatrical architecture through which aristocrats visualize their habitus. Their embodied dispositions—confidence in ritual correctness, fluency in liturgical codes, familiarity with Kawi or Sanskritic textual traditions—are materialized in artistic patronage. The commission of renowned undagi, the hiring of respected *sulinggih*, and the adherence to precise *taksu* formulas collectively reinforce an image of cultivated refinement. Art here is not autonomous expression but social performance.

Conversely, families of modest means often commission simplified or partially prefabricated *petulangan*. Though ritually valid, these are frequently perceived as “kurang suci” (sacred less) or lacking *wibawa* (authority) within prevailing community standards. Such aesthetic judgments naturalize social stratification. Economic limitation becomes visible as aesthetic reduction. What appears to be a matter of taste is in fact structured by differential access to capital.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus clarifies how these distinctions are internalized. Habitus consists of durable dispositions that orient perception and action according to one's social trajectory. Within the ritual field, habitus shapes what families perceive as “appropriate,” “beautiful,” or “worthy.” High-status families may feel compelled—indeed morally obligated—to sponsor elaborate cremations in order to honor ancestral prestige. To fail in aesthetic magnificence would risk symbolic decline. Meanwhile, lower-status families often

accept more modest forms as congruent with their position in the ritual economy. Through such patterned expectations, hierarchy reproduces itself without explicit coercion.

The *petulangan* thus becomes a site where multiple forms of capital intersect: 1. Economic capital: funding materials, artisans, and ritual specialists; 2. Cultural capital: knowledge of canonical iconography and textual prescriptions; 3. Social capital: networks with prestigious priests and craft lineages; 4. Symbolic capital: public recognition of ritual authority and spiritual legitimacy.

These forms of capital circulate through aesthetic visibility. The effigy is both devotional object and social mirror. Its grandeur projects aristocratic continuity; its iconography encodes lineage memory; its ritual precision signals cultivated legitimacy. Through art, the aristocrat represents not merely the deceased but the enduring vitality of their house.

Contemporary socio-economic transformations complicate this visual economy. The growth of tourism and remittance-based wealth in Bali has enabled segments of the emerging middle class to appropriate elite ritual aesthetics. By commissioning larger *petulangan*, engaging prominent priests, or emulating aristocratic liturgical styles, upwardly mobile families attempt to convert newly acquired economic capital into symbolic recognition. This mimetic process reveals ritual architecture as a contested arena of cultural struggle. Distinction must continually be reasserted when its visual markers become replicable.

Yet such spectacularizing generates tension. Critics within the community question whether ritual has drifted toward ostentatious display, arguing for a return to spiritual essence over material extravagance. The debate reflects a broader struggle over who defines authenticity and how sacred value should be visualized. Is spiritual efficacy measured through inner devotion or through aesthetic magnificence?

Ultimately, the *petulangan* operates as a medium through which aristocratic identity is aestheticized and capital is made visible. It is both an artwork and a social diagram—an object in which devotion, hierarchy, and visual representation converge. Through Bourdieu's lens, ritual architecture appears not only as cosmological symbol but as a field of distinction where material form embodies immaterial structures of prestige and power.

In honouring the dead, the ritual simultaneously reanimates social differentiation among the living. The *petulangan* stands as a luminous artifact of this paradox: sacred art that visualizes capital, and capital that seeks legitimacy through sacred art.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reconceptualizes the *petulangan* not merely as a funerary vehicle, but as a material technology through which cosmology, hierarchy, and authority are enacted. Moving beyond symbolic-descriptive readings associated with Clifford Geertz and Fred B. Eiseman Jr., this article applies the frameworks of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu to position the *petulangan* as a field of power, knowledge, and distinction.

From a Foucauldian perspective, ritual prescriptions regulating form, iconography, and proportion constitute a regime of truth in which aesthetic correctness guarantees spiritual legitimacy. Architecture thus operates as governance: visual orthodoxy stabilizes cosmological order and disciplines communal perception.

Through Bourdieu's lens, cremation aesthetics convert economic, cultural, and social capital into symbolic capital. Monumentality and ornamentation become strategies of distinction, making hierarchy publicly visible. The *petulangan* transforms material

investment into recognized prestige, staging lineage, literacy, and ritual authority in aesthetic form.

Although contemporary economic and social transformations reshape patterns of patronage, the symbolic grammar of hierarchy remains resilient. Ephemeral in material form yet enduring in social effect, the *petulangan* materializes power at the threshold of death—where sacred art simultaneously honors the departed and reproduces the cultural order of the living.

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