



## Philosophical Leadership Values of Surakarta Sunanate: A Symbolic Analysis of Dhadhak Merak and Singa Barong Masks in Ponorogo Reyog Performance

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### **Abstract**

This research examines the philosophical values of Surakarta Palace leadership embedded within the Barongan and Dhadhak Merak elements of Reyog Ponorogo performance art. Through qualitative analysis and in-depth interviews with cultural experts, this study reveals how these performance elements serve as sophisticated media for intercultural communication between Surakarta Palace and the Panaragan traditional community. The research focuses on how the royal title "Senapati ing Ngalaga Ngabdurrahman Sayidin Panatagama" finds symbolic expression through these performance elements, particularly during the colonial period. The study employs semiotic analysis to decode the symbolic meanings within the physical characteristics of both Barongan and Dhadhak Merak, revealing a complex system of cultural messaging through the palace's pagedhongan tradition. Findings indicate that the Barongan's tiger-head form represents the Senapati ing Ngalaga value, symbolizing leadership strength and courage, while the Dhadhak Merak's peacock elements embody the Sayidin Panatagama concept, representing wisdom and harmonious governance. The unification of these elements in performance symbolizes the Ngabdurrahman value, demonstrating the balance between strength and wisdom in leadership. This research contributes to understanding how traditional performing arts can function as vehicles for cultural preservation and resistance while maintaining sophisticated systems of philosophical transmission. The study highlights the enduring relevance of traditional Javanese leadership principles and their expression through cultural performance.

**Keywords:** *Intercultural Communication, Reyog Ponorogo, Surakarta Palace, Leadership Philosophy, Cultural Symbolism*

### **Introduction**

The inscription of Reyog Ponorogo as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO on December 3, 2024, under the category "in Need of Urgent Safeguarding," marks a significant milestone in cultural preservation. This recognition stems from the art form's embodiment of profound philosophical values and indigenous knowledge systems that warrant immediate conservation efforts. As Kurin (2019) emphasizes, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage requires not only documentation but also active engagement with its living traditions and philosophical underpinnings.

The cultural significance of Reyog Ponorogo is deeply rooted in Javanese traditions, particularly within the Ponorogo region. Javanese cultural scholarship encompasses a comprehensive framework of identity, cognitive patterns, ethical principles, moral values, and customary practices transmitted intergenerationally. Despite millennia of cultural evolution, the fundamental essence of Javanese culture has demonstrated remarkable resilience while maintaining exceptional adaptability in its interactions with diverse cultural traditions, primarily due to its robust ethical foundation (Suseno, 1984). Aikawa-Faure (2018) further argues that such cultural resilience is crucial for the sustainable preservation of traditional performing arts.

The philosophical dimensions of Javanese leadership, as analyzed by Moeljono (2017), are intrinsically woven into the symbolic fabric of Reyog Ponorogo. Anderson (2020) elaborates that Javanese power concepts are often manifested through artistic expressions, serving as vehicles for transmitting leadership values. As a manifestation of Javanese folk artistry, Reyog Ponorogo exemplifies egalitarian principles and dynamic performance elements. The art form serves as a traditional communication medium, incorporating multiple layers of symbolic significance and philosophical depth.

Turner (2017) posits that ritual performances, such as Reyog Ponorogo, function as complex symbol systems that encode cultural values and social meanings. This cultural expression illustrates the intricate relationship between communication and cultural systems, where culture encompasses an integrated framework of values, beliefs, artifacts, linguistic elements, artistic expressions, lifestyle patterns, ethical considerations, and communicative paradigms (DeVito, 2016). Dissanayake (2018) further emphasizes how traditional Asian performing arts serve as sophisticated communication media, transmitting cultural knowledge across generations.

The narrative foundation of Reyog Ponorogo derives from the folkloric account of Prabu Klana Sewandana from the Bantarangin kingdom and his pursuit of Dewi Sanggalangit from Kediri. Central to this narrative is the protagonist's challenge to overcome Singo Barong, Sanggalangit's mythical guardian, achieved through the strategic intervention of Pujangga Anom. This historical narrative has evolved into the contemporary performance tradition (Wijaya, 2023), exemplifying what Schechner (2020) describes as the transformation of historical narratives into living performance traditions.

The historical nexus between the Surakarta Sunanate (Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta Hadiningrat) and Ponorogo is particularly significant. Pemberton (2019) details how Javanese courts functioned as centers of cultural authority and artistic innovation. Established in 1745 CE under the sovereignty of King Sinuhun Pakubuwana II, legitimate heir to the Islamic Mataram Dynasty, the palace maintained administrative authority over Ponorogo. Margana (2020) provides extensive documentation of how the Surakarta Palace influenced regional artistic traditions throughout its territories.

Historical records, notably the authoritative Babad Ponorogo by Raden Mas Suryobroto, indicate that Ponorogo, formerly known as Wengker, constituted a significant territory within the Majapahit kingdom. During the 15th-century decline of Majapahit, Ki Ageng Suryangalam established the influential Suru Kubeng training center, innovatively integrating martial arts instruction with Reog gamelan accompaniment (Purwowijoyo, 1985). Lindsay (2018) notes that such historical continuity in performing arts traditions is crucial for maintaining cultural identity in contemporary Indonesia.

This research examines the transmission of cultural values from the Surakarta Palace to Ponorogo's local traditions, specifically focusing on the philosophical elements embedded within Reyog Ponorogo's instrumental symbolism. The study analyzes the leadership philosophical values of Surakarta's rulers as manifested through two core performance elements: the dhadhak merak and Singa Barong mask. This analysis is particularly pertinent given Reyog Ponorogo's current UNESCO status, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural preservation and the maintenance of intangible cultural heritage.

## **Method**

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing inductive data analysis based on discovered facts that are subsequently constructed into hypotheses or theories (Abdussamad, 2021a). Qualitative research focuses on examining phenomena within their specific contexts, where the quality of interpretation is largely determined by the researcher's analytical expertise (Abdussamad, 2021b). The methodology emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural phenomena through systematic observation and interpretation of social realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2020).

The research design incorporates ethnographic elements, as outlined by Spradley (2016), focusing on the detailed observation and documentation of cultural practices, beliefs, and social interactions within their natural settings. This approach is particularly relevant for studying traditional performing arts, where meaning is deeply embedded in cultural contexts and social relationships. Additionally, the study employs hermeneutic phenomenology principles (van Manen, 2016) to understand the lived experiences and interpretations of cultural practitioners and bearers of traditional knowledge.

Data collection was conducted through multiple methods to ensure comprehensive coverage and methodological triangulation (Flick, 2018). Primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants, selected through purposive sampling technique - a method of selecting samples that meet specific criteria aligned with research data requirements (Creswell, 2018). Participant observation, as described by DeWalt and DeWalt (2019), was also employed to gain firsthand experience of Reyog Ponorogo performances and associated cultural practices. Documentary analysis of historical records, archival materials, and contemporary cultural documentation supplemented the primary data collection.

The research process follows a systematic grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2017), where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in an iterative process. Primary field data is first categorized and then synthesized with literature reviews and secondary data relevant to the research object. This triangulation of data sources enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings (Yin, 2018). The analytical framework primarily employs Clifford Geertz's symbolic interpretive theory, complemented by Turner's (2017) concepts of cultural performance and ritual symbolism.

The interpretation process utilizes thick description methodology (Ponterotto, 2016), providing detailed accounts of cultural phenomena while considering their broader contextual significance. This approach examines multiple dimensions of cultural expression, including:

1. Symbolic and semiotic elements
2. Historical and social contexts
3. Power relations and cultural hierarchies
4. Transmission of traditional knowledge
5. Spiritual and philosophical underpinnings

The analysis is further strengthened by applying critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2019), examining how cultural meanings are constructed, negotiated, and maintained through various forms of communication and performance.

Key informants were selected based on their expertise and cultural authority, following Maxwell's (2018) guidelines for purposeful selection in qualitative research. The first informant, Kangjeng Gusti Pangeran Haryo (KGPH) Puger, son of Sinuhun Pakubuwana XII from Surakarta Palace, provides insights into royal court traditions and philosophical values. The second informant, Supriyono, a prominent Warok figure from Ponorogo, offers deep understanding of local cultural practices and traditions. The third informant, Gondo Puspito, a cultural observer in Ponorogo, contributes analytical perspectives on the cultural significance and evolution of Reyog Ponorogo.

Data validation employs multiple strategies, including member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 2016), peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement in the field. The research also incorporates reflexivity practices (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018), acknowledging the researcher's positionality and potential biases in the interpretation process. This comprehensive methodological framework ensures rigorous analysis while maintaining sensitivity to cultural nuances and ethical considerations in cultural heritage research.

Through this enhanced methodological approach, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the leadership philosophical values embedded within Reyog Ponorogo's symbolic elements, particularly as they relate to Surakarta Palace traditions. The integration of multiple theoretical perspectives and methodological tools enables a thorough examination of the research questions while maintaining academic rigor and cultural sensitivity.

**Result and Discussion**

**Results**

Table 1: Analysis of Leadership Philosophy Values in Reyog Ponorogo Elements

Component	Physical Description	Symbolic Meaning	Leadership Value
<b>Barongan</b>	- Head of tiger shape - 6 small fangs - 4 large fangs - Four colors (black, white, yellow, red)	- Small fangs: 6 pillars of faith - Large fangs: 4 human desires - Colors: cardinal directions	- Religious leadership - Self-control - Spiritual strength
<b>Dhadhak Merak</b>	- Peacock feathers arrangement - Bamboo frame - Flexible structure - Beak holding prayer beads	- Beauty and wisdom - Flexibility and strength - Spiritual devotion	- Wisdom in leadership - Adaptability - Harmonious governance
<b>Combined Performance</b>	- Weight: 50 kg - Performed using mouth grip (cakotan) - Unified movement	- Physical and spiritual endurance - "Ngandel lan eling" concept - Balance of power and wisdom	- Strength with wisdom - Divine consciousness - Balanced leadership

Figure 1. Leadership Philosophy Values



Table 1 presents a detailed analysis of the physical and symbolic elements found in Reyog Ponorogo's primary components, specifically focusing on the Barongan and Dhadhak Merak. The table systematically maps the relationship between tangible characteristics and their deeper philosophical meanings in the context of leadership values. Through three distinct dimensions - physical description, symbolic meaning, and leadership value - the table illuminates how traditional performance elements embody complex leadership principles.

The physical descriptions capture the detailed craftsmanship and structural elements of each component, from the precise arrangement of fangs in the Barongan to the intricate assembly of peacock feathers in the Dhadhak Merak. These physical elements are then connected to their symbolic interpretations, revealing a sophisticated system of cultural and spiritual messaging embedded within the performance art. The leadership values column demonstrates how these physical and symbolic elements translate into practical leadership principles that align with Surakarta Palace traditions.

Table 2: Royal Title Elements and Their Leadership Values

Title Component	Literal Meaning	Leadership Philosophy
Senapati ing Ngalaga	Supreme War Commander	- Decisiveness - Risk-taking ability - Protection of people
Ngabdurrahman	Receiver of Allah's mercy	- Compassionate leadership - Divine guidance
Sayidin Panatagama	Religious Leader	- Religious wisdom - Just governance - Moral authority

Figure 2. Royal Title Elements



Table 2 provides a systematic analysis of the traditional royal titles used by Surakarta Palace rulers, examining their literal meanings and leadership implications. The table's structure enables readers to understand the progression from formal title components to their practical leadership applications. Through three interconnected columns, the table reveals how each element of the royal title carries specific leadership expectations and philosophical principles.

The analysis demonstrates the sophisticated nature of Javanese leadership concepts, where formal titles serve as more than mere designations - they function as comprehensive frameworks for leadership behavior and responsibility. The table effectively shows how traditional royal titles encode complex leadership philosophies that combine religious, military, and administrative responsibilities, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Javanese royal leadership.



### Discussion

Intercultural communication dynamics between Surakarta Palace and Ponorogo represent a complex system of cultural interaction that merits detailed analysis through multiple theoretical frameworks. Their relationship demonstrates unique characteristics where dominant and co-cultural elements coexist harmoniously despite distinct communication styles. Drawing from Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel's (2009a:12) concept of dominant culture, Surakarta Palace's position as the dominant culture is evident through its established cultural system, particularly the *pagedhongan* tradition. This sophisticated system of symbolic messaging through *sanepan* (analogies), *pralambang* (signs), and *pasemon* (representations) forms the backbone of palace communication (Purwawiyata, 1939:1000). Palace cultural dominance is further reinforced by its historical position as the heir to the Mataram Islamic Dynasty and its role in preserving and propagating Javanese cultural values.

Fundamental relationship between these cultural entities demonstrates a successful application of Mark P. Orbe's co-cultural theory (1998:102-105), where the Panaragan community, represented by Warok figures, chose accommodation as their approach to cultural interaction. Such accommodation is evidenced by their maintenance of distinct cultural characteristics while collaborating with Surakarta Palace, particularly in their shared resistance against colonialism. Successful implementation of this accommodation is reflected in Ponorogo's special status as a "*Perdikan*" region, maintaining cultural sovereignty while acknowledging palace authority. Warok's role as cultural intermediaries proved crucial in facilitating this balanced relationship. Their ability to navigate between high and low context communication styles contributed significantly to the successful cultural integration.

Communication patterns between these entities align perfectly with Hall's (1976:113) concept of High and Low Context Culture, providing a theoretical framework for understanding their interaction dynamics. Palace's *pagedhongan* tradition exemplifies high-context communication, where messages are conveyed implicitly through symbolic means. Direct contrast appears in the more straightforward, low-context communication style of the Panaragan community, as evidenced by the Warok's characteristics of being *tegas* (firm) and *lugas* (straightforward) (Sugianto, 2016:46-48). Successful integration of these contrasting communication styles demonstrates the sophistication of traditional Javanese cultural systems in accommodating diverse communication approaches.

Philosophical values embedded in the royal title "Senapati ing Ngalaga Ngabdurrahman Sayidin Panatagama" find profound expression through Barongan and Dhadhak Merak elements, demonstrating what Kuntowijoyo (1987:24-25) describes as fundamental subsystems of Javanese culture. Cultural

synthesis manifests clearly in how these court-based philosophical concepts are transmitted through folk performance traditions. Artistic elements of Reyog Ponorogo serve as perfect vessels for these complex philosophical ideas. Traditional performance aspects successfully bridge the gap between elite court culture and popular folk expressions. Integration of these elements demonstrates remarkable cultural adaptability in Javanese traditional systems.

Symbolic analysis of these performance elements aligns perfectly with Barthes's semiotic theory (Griffin et al., 2019:321), revealing multiple layers of meaning within physical representations. Physical components (*penanda*) of Barongan and Dhadhak Merak carry deeper spiritual and philosophical meanings (*petanda*) that extend beyond immediate symbolic representations. Religious symbolism appears prominently in the Barongan's six small fangs representing Islamic pillars of faith. Numerical significance emerges in the four large fangs symbolizing human desires and cardinal directions. Complex interplay between these elements creates a rich tapestry of cultural meaning.

Historical context plays crucial role in understanding the development of this intercultural relationship, as evidenced in Babad Tanah Jawi's documentation of Ponorogo's role as a military base. Military alliance between these entities evolved into cultural cooperation over time. Strategic partnership transformed into spiritual and cultural bonds. Historical documentation provides crucial evidence for understanding the depth of this relationship. Multiple sources confirm the longstanding nature of these cultural ties.

Warok figures emerge as central elements in maintaining cultural balance between palace traditions and local customs. Their unique position allows them to interpret and transmit cultural values between different social contexts. Spiritual authority of Warok figures complements the formal authority of palace structures. Cultural intermediary role proves essential in maintaining harmonious relationships. Traditional knowledge systems benefit from this dual authority structure.

Performance aspects of Reyog Ponorogo demonstrate sophisticated integration of physical and philosophical elements in cultural expression. Weight of combined Barongan and Dhadhak Merak (50 kilograms) symbolizes the burden of leadership responsibility. Physical challenges in performance mirror spiritual and philosophical challenges in leadership. Traditional performance techniques encode complex cultural messages. Artistic elements serve multiple purposes in cultural transmission.

Mythological elements in Reyog Ponorogo support Markway and Ampel's (2018:2-3) assertions about myth's role in building communication confidence. Cultural symbols serve both artistic and political purposes in resistance against colonial powers. Traditional performances provide safe spaces for cultural expression and resistance. Mythological framework allows for subtle communication of complex ideas. Artistic elements mask deeper political and social messages.

Cultural accommodation strategies reveal sophisticated understanding of power dynamics in traditional Javanese society. Palace traditions acknowledge and respect local cultural autonomy while maintaining overall cultural authority. Mutual respect characterizes relationships between different cultural entities. Traditional systems demonstrate remarkable flexibility in managing cultural differences. Social harmony emerges from balanced cultural relationships.

Leadership values transmitted through artistic elements demonstrate deep understanding of symbolic communication. Physical representations carry multiple layers of meaning accessible to different audiences. Traditional performance elements encode complex philosophical concepts. Artistic expression serves educational and political purposes. Cultural transmission occurs through multiple channels simultaneously.

Pagedhongan tradition demonstrates sophisticated understanding of contextual communication needs in traditional society. Symbolic messaging allows for safe transmission of sensitive information. Cultural coding provides protection for important messages. Traditional communication systems show remarkable adaptability. Multiple meaning levels ensure message preservation.

Religious elements interwoven with cultural expressions reveal sophisticated integration of spiritual and secular authority. Islamic concepts blend seamlessly with traditional Javanese cultural elements. Spiritual authority reinforces cultural leadership roles. Religious symbolism enhances cultural message transmission. Traditional systems demonstrate remarkable religious tolerance.

Performance traditions serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and wisdom. Artistic elements preserve important cultural information across generations. Traditional performances maintain cultural continuity. Artistic expression ensures cultural survival. Performance traditions adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining core values.

Cultural resistance against colonial powers finds subtle expression through artistic elements. Traditional performances provide cover for anti-colonial messages. Artistic expression allows for safe political communication. Cultural traditions preserve community identity under pressure. Performance elements maintain cultural integrity.

Successful integration of different communication styles demonstrates sophisticated cultural understanding. High and low context communication patterns complement each other in traditional systems. Cultural differences enhance rather than inhibit communication. Traditional systems show remarkable adaptability. Communication patterns evolve while maintaining cultural integrity.

Modern implications of these traditional relationships provide valuable lessons for contemporary intercultural communication. Historical examples demonstrate successful management of cultural differences. Traditional systems offer insights for modern challenges. Cultural wisdom remains relevant in contemporary contexts. Ancient solutions address modern problems effectively.

Future research directions emerge from analysis of these traditional cultural relationships. Deeper investigation of symbolic communication systems promises valuable insights. Traditional cultural systems deserve continued scholarly attention. Modern applications of traditional wisdom merit exploration. Ancient cultural solutions offer modern relevance.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the conducted analysis, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the intercultural communication between Surakarta Palace and the Ponorogo community. The Dhadhak Merak and Barongan instruments in Reyog Ponorogo performances serve as sophisticated media for intercultural communication between Surakarta Palace and the Warok and Panaragan traditional communities. These elements function as vehicles for transmitting complex leadership values through carefully coded cultural symbols. The use of pagedhongan tradition enabled subtle resistance against colonial powers while preserving important cultural messages. Through this sophisticated system, traditional performing arts successfully maintained cultural integrity while adapting to political pressures.

The symbolic representation of leadership values manifests primarily through the *Senapati ing Ngalaga* concept, embodied in the Singa Barong mask's tiger-head form. This symbolism represents leadership decisiveness, courage, bravery, and patriotic dedication in governance. The physical characteristics of the Barongan, including its fierce appearance and structural elements, reinforce these leadership qualities. The mask's design and performance requirements demonstrate the physical and



spiritual strength expected in leadership roles. This symbolism aligns perfectly with the palace's traditional concepts of leadership authority and responsibility.

The Sayidin Panatagama concept finds expression through the peacock elements (Dhadhak Merak), representing wisdom, intelligence, and the ability to create harmony through peaceful leadership. The graceful movements and intricate design of the Dhadhak Merak symbolize the sophisticated nature of cultural leadership. The peacock's natural beauty and dignity in the performance reflect the ideal characteristics of wise governance. These elements demonstrate how aesthetic beauty can convey profound leadership principles.

The unification of these elements in performance represents the Ngabdurrahman value, symbolizing justice and compassionate governance through the balanced integration of strength and wisdom. The physical challenge of performing with both elements demonstrates the complexity of balancing different leadership qualities. The harmonious combination of fierce and graceful elements in performance reflects the ideal balance in leadership. This integration of seemingly opposing characteristics reveals the sophisticated nature of traditional Javanese leadership philosophy.

This sophisticated system of cultural symbolism demonstrates how traditional performing arts can serve multiple purposes: preserving cultural values, enabling political resistance, and maintaining cultural identity while adapting to changing circumstances. The success of this intercultural communication model provides valuable insights for understanding how different cultural traditions can coexist and complement each other while serving broader social and political purposes. The enduring relevance of these symbolic systems suggests their continued value in understanding cultural communication and leadership principles.

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