

## Symbolic Visualization of the Cowong Banyumas Doll using the Iconology-Iconography Theory of Erwin Panofsky

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### Abstract

*This research is qualitative in nature using an art history method approach to understand the symbolic visualization of the Cowong Banyumas doll using the iconology-iconography theory of Erwin Panofsky. The methods used are (1) topic selection (2) collection of written, artefact, and oral sources, (3) verification/critique of sources (4) interpretation in the form of analysis and synthesis, (5) writing of research results. The result of the research is a pre-iconographic description related to the textual aspects of the Cowong doll which is a work of art made from materials that exist in the daily environment of the Banyumas people, made with a form stylization technique with a decorative style. In the iconographic analysis related to the theme and concept of the Cowong doll, it is concluded that the Cowong doll is a form of communication media for life problems due to a long drought (prey for famine) so that it has an impact on the lives of the agrarian Banyumas people. In the iconological interpretation related to symbolic value, the Cowong doll is a medium created through the spirit of art with the embodiment of feelings, emotions, and actions to convey communication to the Almighty through objects from nature. In the Cowong doll, there are several interconnected systems namely between humans, ancestral culture, nature, and religion. This can be categorized as syncretism, which is something that is achieved from a process to process, unite, combine and harmonize several existing systems.*

### Keywords

Cowongan; doll; tradition; Banyumas.



### I. Introduction

The influence of Indian Culture (Hinduism and Buddhism) in Banyumas can be seen in its artistic traditions, such as the Cowongan art tradition. Cowongan is a ritual for the Gods, especially Dewi Sri as the Goddess of fertility. This ritual is carried out by farmers in Banyumas to ask for rain as an effort for a successful harvest. This ritual is carried out during the long dry season or what is called the famine period. The famine period is when the plant turns yellow due to too long heat. The emergence of this Cowongan tradition cannot be separated from the majority of the people who are farming. As an agricultural area, nature is the central thing in their activities. Nature is something that must be protected because nature is the source of people's lives. This is reflected in the Cowongan cultural tradition as a form of culture carried out by the community to maintain the sustainability of its nature for the success of harvesting as a source of food for life itself.

The dominant culture or indigenous culture commonly influences the culture of the minority or the immigrant culture, and subsequently, the minority culture is affected by the dominant culture due to the cultural pressures of the culture itself (Pandapotan, 2020).

At this time the Cowongan art tradition has begun to be rarely played. According to the author's observations, one of them who is still active in carrying out this tradition is the Cowongsewu Studio. The Cowongsewu Studio is managed by a puppeteer, Titu Edi

Purwanto. He said that “Cowongan's traditional art is an ancestral heritage that must be preserved. Currently, people have started to forget the traditional arts of Cowongan, even the word Cowongan, people do not understand. Therefore, Cowongsewu Studio brings back the Cowongan art tradition that has been abandoned by the community to be displayed again in the form of performing arts.

At the time of the show, Cowongan art was performed by the Cowongsewu Studio, Pangebatan Village, Banyumas Regency. A very strong symbol used and always present in a show is the Cowong doll. Cowong dolls in the Cowongan traditional ritual are a medium used to invite angels to descend to earth. Cowong dolls are made from utensils such as irus or siwur (spoons/dippers made of coconut shells) which are carved on the face (decorated) to resemble a woman (princess). Cowong dolls are often associated with religious understanding, some people consider it contrary to religious teachings, especially Islam, which is called shirk. Like the negative stigma received by Titut Edi Purwanto, the puppeteer of Cowongan at the Cowongsewu Studio, who is considered a devil worshipper.

Based on the description above, the Cowong Doll is an interesting thing to learn from the historical aspect in terms of the concepts and narratives behind the doll object, as well as the symbolic value that exists in the cultural object of the Cowongan art tradition, with an analytical approach to the symbolic visualization of the Cowong Banyumas doll based on the iconology concept. Erwin Panofsky's iconography can be formulated as follows. First, how is the visual of the Cowong Banyumas doll, which is factual and expressive? Second, how are the themes and concepts built by the Cowong doll from Banyumas? Third, what symbolic value is visualized in the Cowong doll from Banyumas? The purpose of this research is to find out the visual meaning of the Cowong Banyumas doll which is factual and expressive. Second, knowing the themes and concepts built by the Cowong doll from Banyumas. Third, knowing the value contained in the visualization of the Cowong doll from Banyumas

## II. Review of Literature

In previous research, no one has conducted research specifically on the symbolic visualization of the *Cowong* doll in the *Cowongan* ritual in Banyumas. However, the previous study of *Cowongan* rituals looked at the ritual as a whole, while previous studies were carried out by Lynda Susana Widya Ayu Fatmawaty, M.Hum, Aidatul Chusna, M.A., Muhammad Taufiqurrahman, M.Hum. With the title Structure and Meaning in the Ritual of Calling the Rain (*Cowongan*) in Banyumas. The results of the research show that *Cowongan* is a ritual to summon rain that is carried out by farmers during the long dry season. In the *Cowongan* ritual, there is a sequence of processions carried out starting from the burning of *menyan* by the *dalang* and ritual performers. The performers of this *Cowongan* ritual consist of puppeteers, nymphs, devils, *sinden*, and also the farming community, then the chanting of mantras, mantras has an important role in the ritual procession, namely to summon angels to come down to earth to bring rainwater. After that, they perform "raising" the angels around the ritual place, the ritual ends with dancing together and sending messages to the community to always do good to each other between fellow humans (Fatmawaty, Chusna, and Taufiqurrahman 2017).

Another research conducted by S F Kamal with the title Forms and Values Contained in the *Cowongan* Tradition in Banyumas Regency: Cultural Studies. The results of this study look at the form of the *Cowongan* tradition, that there are traditional actors, offerings, and poems in the form of prayer songs. The implementation stage is divided into three stages including the preparation, implementation, and final stages of implementation.

The values contained in the *Cowongan* tradition are, firstly, social values that evoke the spirit of cooperation. Second, the value of object symbols in the *Cowongan* tradition is a symbol related to beauty in works of art. Third, religious values related to prayers to the Creator (S. F. Kamal 2018).

Subsequent research from SF Kamal, K Saddhono, and Suyitno with the title *Cowongan* is the Culture Heritage of Banyumas: Relevance of Rituals as part of the Value Character Education, the results of this study indicate that there is a relevance of *Cowongan* ritual values with high school character education (SMA). ) in Baturaden, namely cultural, aesthetic, and religious values. The *Cowongan* tradition is a positive attitude that can be used as a lesson for a better life (S. Kamal, Saddhono, and Suyitno 2019).

Based on the previous research that has been described in the paragraph above, there are similarities from the object of research, namely the *Cowongan* ritual which is a Banyumas tradition as a local genius that exists in society as a medium of learning the values that have been passed down from generation to generation. of every generation. Previous research has focused on *Cowongan* in general, in the form of practices and values of ritual traditions. However, in this study, the focus of the study will be more specific on the media used in the *Cowongan* ritual, namely the *Cowong* doll. *Cowong* dolls are the main media used in ritual processions, as well as a symbol of the *Cowongan* tradition. Therefore, this research is interesting to do, by analyzing the symbolic visualization of the *Cowong* doll with an art history approach.

### III. Research Method

This research is qualitative in nature which is a method for uncovering and understanding meaning by a group of people or individuals who are ascribed to social or humanitarian problems (Creswell 2010). This qualitative research uses an art history method approach strategy to understand the symbolic visualization of the *Cowong* doll in Banyumas, using the iconological theory of Erwin Panofsky. The historical method approach can be formulated into five stages including, (1) selecting topics to be studied based on emotional and intellectual closeness, (2) collecting sources in the form of written, artifact, and oral documents, (3) historical verification/criticism, the validity of the source which includes authenticity and credibility, (4) interpretation in the form of analysis and synthesis, (5) writing in the form of research results or conclusions (Kuntowijoyo 2000).



Source: Nofrizaldi. Documentation  
**Figure 1.** The *Cowong* Doll, front and back view




Data collection in this study was carried out by direct observation of the Cowong puppet object in Banyumas, namely the Cowongsewu Studio, by conducting a literature review and interviews with the Cowongan puppeteer Titut Edi Purwanto and also cultural observers as observers of Cowongan traditional arts in Banyumas.






## IV. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Pre-Iconographical Description

The discussion at the Pre-Iconography stage is the first stage carried out to see the textual aspects that are within the boundaries of the artistic motifs of a work of art. This artistic motif is the primary meaning formed from factual and expressional meaning (Panofsky 1955). Factual meaning can be identified through visuals that are present in a work such as shapes, colors, lines, techniques, materials, and also representational objects such as animals, humans, plants, and other objects. In the *Cowong* doll object which is a representation of the human form, to see its factual meaning, it can be divided into several groupings of body parts, as described in the table below.

**Table 1.** The factual meaning of the *Cowong* doll

No	Body	Picture	Description
1	Head	<p>a. Front view</p>  <p>b. Back view</p> 	<p>The head of the <i>Cowong</i> doll is made of coconut shell, on the front of the shell, it is drawn to resemble a female human, using natural dyes from materials such as charcoal, turmeric, and flour, on the right and left cheeks given a red line. At the top of the shell, there is palm fiber with a length of about 7 cm which is tied to form like hair. The back of the shell has a cavity / empty hole</p>
2	Chest	<p>a. Front view</p>  <p>b. Back view</p>	<p>The body of the <i>Cowong</i> doll is covered with <i>tepas</i> which comes from an old brown coconut leaf branch, the <i>tepas</i> are created (covered) on the body and tied at the waist using a black plastic rope, the <i>tepas</i> are supported by a supporting pole made of a piece of fused bamboo. to the top (coconut shell) which is called <i>siwur</i> or dipper.</p>

			
3	Hands	<p>a. Front view</p>  <p>b. Back view</p> 	<p>The hand has horizontal support on the shoulder made of a bamboo stick. The area leading to the body is covered by <i>tepas</i> and tied with a rope as a lock on the arm, while the area away from the body (the end of the bamboo) is not covered by <i>tepas</i>.</p>
4	Foot	<p>a. Front view</p>  <p>b. Back view</p> 	<p>The lower body part in the front view has a <i>tepas</i> which is a continuation of the body that forms a drapery, while in the rearview there is a supporting pole of a bamboo stick which is a continuation of the body.</p>

The next stage is to see the expressional meaning which is an expression of empathy from the ability to observe and feel familiar with the objects and events that occur. By observing the correlation between the objects on the *Cowong* doll and the events that occur or the events can state the expressive quality of the *Cowong* doll. The *Cowong* doll has a coconut shell object that is attached to the support part of the body with a piece of bamboo,

this object is shaped like a tool to take water like a dipper. In Banyumas this tool is called the *siwur* (dipper) which is a daily tool used by the community in their daily needs. The head of the *siwur* is colored and also stroked to resemble a woman which gives the impression of beauty. This can be seen from the application of color on the white part of the face, slanted eyes, and also given a blue character (eyeshadow) above the eyes like a girl who is dressed up at a party, red lips, and hair in a bun at the top like a woman. beautiful java. This *Cowong* doll is also given clothes using *tepas* from an old coconut tree and is brown in color which is created like a long dress with a beautiful cloth drapery that exceeds the length of the legs so that it hangs down to the bottom while the hands-on this doll show openness with the right and left-hand positions. the left that stretches, like someone who is praying to the Almighty. The visual object of this *Cowong* doll shows the expression of a beautiful woman with the make-up and dress she wears. For the material, it is a daily material used by the community, especially mothers for kitchen needs which are re-created into a doll shape called the *Cowong* doll.

In the next stage to obtain the sharpness of the textual description, a confirmation framework is needed using the corrective principle of stylistic interpretation of history. Style can be equated with the term style in English, which is related to the outer form of work, while the flow is a view or principle that is deeper in nature, so "Decorative" is a style because it relates to the outer form of work (SP 2006). Decorative art is an art that stylizes a form into a wider element (Kusnadi 1976) which means that decorative art uses the style of the form (stylization). Stylization is changing the forms that exist in nature to be adapted to artistic forms, as is the case in ornamental and ornamental arts (SP 2006). Based on this, the *Cowong* doll can be categorized as a work of art that has a decorative style with a form stylization technique, because the *Cowong* doll is a form of art made based on objects that exist in nature to be created by stylizing a shape that resembles a woman. This doll is used as a medium in the ritual of asking for rain carried out by the people in Banyumas.

#### 4.2. Iconographical analysis

In the discussion of the second stage, namely the iconographic analysis stage, the stage to analyze the secondary meaning associated with concepts and themes. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the relationship between form and its concepts and themes in practical experience, as well as the relationship between these concepts and themes with images, literal sources, and allegory (Panofsky 1955). *Cowong* dolls are dolls made by the people of Banyumas, especially farmers to beg for rain because they are in a famine (dry season). This doll is made using objects that come from nature to be re-created to resemble human objects which are used as media in the *Cowongan* ritual procession by the Banyumas community.

*Cowongan* art according to humanist Hadi Wijaya has existed during people's lives since time immemorial in Banyumas, passed down from generation to generation. Judging from its history, Banyumas was founded by Adipati Mrapat in the 16th century (Priyadi 2018), the people are a mixture of Sundanese (Pajajaran-Pasirluhur) and Javanese (Majapahit-Wirasaba).(Priyadi 2000). Banyumas traditional art is a symbol of the unification of the two cultures which has been passed down from generation to generation. This inheritance can be seen in the Babad Banyumas Wirjaatmaja which provides positive values to always be passed down from ancestors to future generations of Banyumas people. The teaching of positive values is presented in the form of harmony between humans (small universe) and the universe (big universe) which shows that humans are obliged to maintain the relationship between humans and the nature in which humans live and God

has power over everything that exists (Kuntarto, Widyaningsih, and Riza Chamadi 2019). This relationship is contained in the *Cowongan* ritual tradition, which uses *Cowong* Dolls with material objects using objects that come from nature and are very closely related to people's daily lives, such as the *siwur* (dipper) which is a tool used by mothers in Banyumas to take water. In addition, it also uses materials such as *tepas* from fallen coconut trees, coconut trees are trees that grow very much in Banyumas, the fruit can be used to quench thirst because it contains quite a lot of water, and its contents can also be used as ingredients in making dishes. In general, the object of the *Cowong* doll is the creation of the Banyumas community by using everyday items to be stylized in the form of a beautiful human used in the *Cowongan* ritual process.

In the ritual procession, the *Cowong* doll is used to summon an angel to come down to earth. Based on an interview with Titut Edi Purwanto, a puppeteer of *Cowongan*, said that the *Cowong* doll is a medium used to summon angels to bring rainwater down to earth, in this case, Dewi Sri. Dewi Sri is the goddess of rice which is a symbol of prosperity and well-being. Hadi Wijaya, a Banyumas cultural expert, also added, before the doll is used for the ritual process, it will usually be left in a quiet place such as a tomb, on the edge of a river, under a tree, or on a rock, to do meditation for three days. The *Cowong* is easily "filled" or entered by a spirit who is believed to be an angel who brings rainwater which in the process is accompanied by mantras in the form of a prayer that is asked to the Almighty.

For the iconographic analysis to be sharper, a confirmation framework with the corrective principle of type history interpretation is needed. The history of type is a historical condition that affects the convention of a concept and theme that is expressed in an object and event that occurs within a certain time and period (Burhan 2013). Conventions on themes and concepts about traditional arts which are almost the same as the *Cowongan* tradition are also found in other places, such as the art of Nini Thowong from Bantul Yogyakarta, *CingCowong* from Kuningan, West Java, and so on.

From these various rituals, there are some similarities as well as differences, for example in the Nini Thowong Art which is a tradition of the Grudo community, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, this tradition is carried out for games and also asks for safety. Nini Thowong art has used for a ceremony asking for rain, treatment, *pesugihan*, and looking for lost items (Suwardi 2008). It was also said by the handler of Nini Thowong, namely Mbah Paeran that the art of Nini Thowong made works of art with high ritual elements to enter the spirit into the doll, with one of its functions to cure disease (Ulivia 2018).

In general, these ritual traditions have a lot in common, the spirit of the arts towards a common goal, namely to communicate something about life's problems faced by humans, through objects represented by puppets as a medium to ask for help from something that has power over the universe, even though in practice there are differences in the way of communication but basically, it is a ritual carried out by a group of people in interpreting life according to their respective ways which are influenced by the environment, culture, nature, and religion.

### 4.3. Iconological Interpretation

In the discussion of the iconological interpretation stage, which is the stage to understand the intrinsic meaning of a work of art, based on the pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis described above, a synthetic intuition can be formulated related to the personal psychology and view of life (*weltanschauung*) of the creator of the work to understand the symbols in the artwork. Symbols connect with two complex entities, the origin of the word is *symbolleîn* in Greek, which means "to match".

The symbol was originally an object, sign, word, which was used to recognize each other and with a "meaning" that was already understood (Dillistone 2002).

The initial formulation of the psychological tendencies and way of life of the creation of this *Cowong* puppet art can be seen from the farming community, which historically was the creator of the *Cowong* doll. The visual aspect of this doll uses all the materials that come from nature and is very close to the daily lives of the people. Such as using *siwur* (dipper), *tepas* (coconut branch), turmeric, charcoal, *labur* (limestone), and rope, all the materials used are generally tools used for the kitchen needs of mothers in Banyumas. These simple tools are used to make doll creations by stylizing shapes, as symbols and intermediaries for prayers that are said to the Almighty.

This *Cowong* doll is believed to be a medium to invite ancestral spirits to participate in conveying a request to the Almighty, so that rainwater is sent down. The request for rainwater was made because the rice fields, which were usually drained by water, were now dry so the situation resulted in the community not being able to harvest their agricultural products. Like the rice plant, the rice plant is a plant that becomes the basic needs of the community in daily life, so this *Cowong* doll is present as a communication medium that conveys the problems faced by the community in the long dry season in the form of symbolic language. This can be seen from the material objects that use kitchen utensils to be re-created in the form of dolls that have a new meaning, that the equipment that is usually used by the community for cooking or kitchen purposes can no longer be used according to its function. This is caused by the crisis of agricultural products due to the long dry season. So the daily equipment was made into a *Cowong* doll to communicate the condition of the people at that time that they were in a state of starvation due to the continuous hot weather.

In particular, the symbol also comes from the choice of material used in the *Cowong* doll, such as the selection of *siwur* made from dried coconut shells and bribed (stabbed) using a bamboo stick. This, the coconut shell is clear evidence to be conveyed, that the fruit that contains the most water even at this time is already dry, this is reinforced by bribes made on the part of the coconut shell to prove

The creations have a double meaning, such as coloring the face of the doll, using turmeric, charcoal, and *labur* (limestone) to resemble an angel, and scribbling on the face of the angel on the right and left cheeks. This is interpreted as a form of effort made to present beauty as well as not useful. The beauty that is presented in the form of depicting the character of a beautiful woman to invite ancestral spirits to come to earth, and the second meaning to communicate what was initially thought to be a beautiful woman, turned out to be only a coconut shell that was bribed (*siwur*/dipper), the *siwur* was crossed out as a symbol that the tool could not be used reused properly due to water crisis due to prolonged heat.

The correlation between the symbols presented in the *Cowong* doll is very clearly visible so that it can be formulated that the symbolic value of the *Cowong* doll is a medium created through the spirit of art with the embodiment of feelings, emotions, and actions with the intent and purpose of conveying a communication to the Almighty through objects. -objects from nature as a form of evidence of communication.

Achieving the sharpness of iconological interpretation requires a framework for confirming the corrective principles of cultural history that make up the symbol. Historically, the *Cowongan* ritual tradition was carried out by farmers in Banyumas for the success of their harvest. Banyumas itself is an area where the majority of the people are farming, so Banyumas is called an agricultural area. In its development, ritual traditions



such as *Cowongan* also existed in other areas during the same period, especially in agrarian areas, such as the Nini Thowong ritual in Yogyakarta, Cing *Cowong* in Sunda.

In the *Cowong* doll there is a very strong religious value, believed to be a medium of communication with other nature that is used when in the ritual process. Religious activities carried out by the Banyumas people still combine them with existing past cultures, which can be categorized as syncretism (Saptono 2010). Syncretism is the result achieved from a process to process, unite, combine and harmonize two or more systems (Ahimsa 2001). In the *Cowongan* ritual, several systems are closely related and cannot be separated, namely the relationship between humans, ancestral culture, nature, and religion. This relationship can be seen clearly in the ritual practice, humans in this case the Banyumas people offer prayers to the Almighty through the media of *Cowong* puppets for the safety of plants as a source of life.

## V. Conclusion

The artistic motif of the Cowong doll in Banyumas, which consists of factual and expressive meanings, can be explained that the Cowong doll in Banyumas is a work of art made based on objects that exist in nature, such as siwur (dipper), charcoal, turmeric, tepas (coconut branch), bamboo, labur (limestone), and rope. In general, the materials used are daily ingredients for the kitchen needs of the people in Banyumas. The material is created by performing a form stylization technique called decorative style. The stylization that is carried out is using everyday materials to be re-created to resemble a human, in this case, a beautiful woman like an angel who spreads her hands as if to say a prayer to the Almighty.

In this section, the themes and concepts developed by the Cowong Doll, are works of art from the community, especially farmers, made as a medium of communication to the Almighty over the universe in the form of Cowongan rituals. Cowong dolls are used to summon angels to come down to earth to bring rainwater, in this case, Dewi Sri, who is believed to be the "Goddess of Rice" which is a symbol of prosperity and prosperity. The concept of this Cowong doll object wants to communicate something about the life problems faced by the Banyumas people due to a prolonged drought (prey famine), resulting in a drought that has an impact on agricultural products as a source of life for the agrarian Banyumas community.

In the Intrinsic meaning section of the Cowongan doll, it can be seen from the personal psychology and view of life (*weltanschauung*) of the creator of the work, to understand the symbols contained in the Cowongan doll. After examining the correlation between the existing symbols, it can be formulated that the symbolic value of the Cowong doll is a medium created through the spirit of art with the embodiment of feelings, emotions, and actions with the intent and purpose of conveying a communication to the Almighty through objects from nature in the form of Cowongan ritual practice. The symbols on the Cowong doll as a Cowongan ritual media contain several systems that are closely related and cannot be separated, namely the relationship between humans, ancestral culture, nature, and religion. In this case, the Cowong doll can be categorized as syncretism, which is something that is achieved from a process to process, unite, combine and harmonize several existing systems.

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