

## The Role of Javanese Architecture in Reflecting the Cultural Values, Spirituality, and Belief System of the Javanese People

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**Abstract.** *Traditional Javanese architecture, especially joglo houses, reflect the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and God through designs that are loaded with symbolism and philosophy. The joglo house not only serves as a place to live, but also as a space for religious and social rituals, reflecting the spiritual values and belief system of the Javanese people. In this article, we discuss the elements of joglo house design, such as soko guru, towering roofs, and spatial layouts that depict social and spiritual hierarchies. This study uses a qualitative approach based on literature studies to analyze how traditional Javanese architectural design reflects the cultural values and spirituality of its people. The results of the study show that the preservation of joglo houses as a cultural heritage is very important, but it faces great challenges due to modernization and urbanization. Preservation efforts through cultural education, culture-based tourism, and cross-sectoral cooperation are relevant solutions to maintain the continuity of this traditional architecture.*

**Keywords** *Javanese architecture, joglo house, cultural values, spirituality, belief system, preservation*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Javanese architecture not only reflects aesthetic beauty, but also becomes a symbol of the cultural values that have developed in Javanese society, including the value of spirituality and a deeply rooted belief system. One of the most recognizable forms of traditional Javanese architecture is the joglo house, which has a unique design and is full of symbolism. The joglo house is a clear example of how architecture can reflect the relationship between humans and God, nature, and others. Every design element, from the shape of the roof, the main pillars, to the division of space, is designed not only based on functional considerations, but also based on deep philosophies and spiritual values.

In the historical context, the joglo house not only functions as a place to live, but also as a place to carry out various religious and social rituals. Joglo houses are often used for sacred events such as slametan (thanksgiving celebration), ruwatan (purification ceremony), or other traditional gatherings. The spatial layout in the joglo house has its own philosophy, such as the division of space that reflects the social hierarchy, spiritual role, and daily life of the Javanese people. Every element and spatial arrangement in the joglo house cannot be separated from the mindset of the Javanese people which emphasizes balance, harmony with nature, and social harmony.

However, joglo houses today face major challenges, especially with the rapid modernization and urbanization leading to lifestyle changes. Many joglo houses have lost their social and spiritual functions, or even been replaced by modern buildings that no longer have

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the same cultural values and symbolism. On the other hand, joglo houses are also starting to be marginalized in the context of a more modern and practical urban life. Urban people tend to choose houses with simpler and more functional designs, so joglo houses as a traditional cultural heritage are increasingly rarely used in daily life.

The importance of preserving traditional Javanese architecture, especially joglo houses, is not only related to its physical aspects, but also related to strengthening the cultural identity of the Javanese people which is increasingly eroded by the times. Therefore, it is important to rediscover the role of the joglo house as a representation of the cultural and spiritual values of the Javanese people and answer the challenges faced in its preservation in the midst of modern developments. This article aims to uncover more deeply how design elements in traditional Javanese architecture, particularly joglo houses, reflect the cultural values, spirituality, and belief systems of the Javanese people, as well as discuss the preservation efforts that can be made to maintain the continuity of this cultural heritage.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Javanese Architectural Philosophy**

Javanese architectural philosophy is an integral part of the cultural concept and belief system embraced by the Javanese people. Traditional Javanese architecture, especially joglo houses, is seen as a manifestation of man's relationship with God, nature, and others. This philosophy teaches the importance of balance and harmony between these elements. The basic concept in Javanese architecture is often expressed through the proverb "manunggaling kawula and Gusti," which means "the unity of servant and God." This philosophy teaches that humans must always maintain a harmonious relationship with God, as well as maintain harmony between humans and nature and others.

According to (Tri, Utomo, & Subiyantoro, n.d.) one of the Javanese architectures, the joglo, is the most complete type of building and is built with the basic principle of cosmic equilibrium. One of the main elements that represents this balance is the soko guru, or the main pillar of the house. Soko Guru symbolizes the relationship between humans and the universe, as well as the four cardinal winds that affect human life. This philosophy shows how the design of joglo houses not only pays attention to functional and aesthetic aspects, but also contains spiritual values that guide social and personal life.

In addition, the towering joglo roof also symbolizes the vertical relationship between humans and God, as a divine protection that always watches over the lives of the occupants of the house. The spiritual values embedded in Javanese architectural design make the joglo house

more than just a place to live, but also a space that allows residents to feel closeness to the Almighty (Arsitektur & Teknik, 1999).

## **2. Spiritual Values and Belief Systems**

Traditional Javanese architecture is closely related to the spiritual values and belief system of its people. The joglo house not only functions as a residence, but also as a place to carry out various spiritual rituals, such as slametan (thanksgiving) and ruwatan (purification ceremony). According to (Ronald, 2005), joglo houses are designed with a spatial layout that allows ritual and social activities to be carried out smoothly, while maintaining the purity and integrity of the relationship between the residents and the supernatural powers they believe.

One of the elements of space that reflects spiritual values is senthong. Senthong is a very sacred space and is often used for meditation activities, storing heirlooms, and other spiritual activities. The materials used to build the joglo house also have their own spiritual meaning. Teak wood, for example, was chosen because it is considered a pure and sacred material, and has positive energy that can support the spiritual life of the residents of the house (Rachmawati, 2019).

The spatial layout of the joglo house is designed to facilitate daily life based on the values of mutual cooperation and togetherness. The front of the house, like the pendopo, is designed to be open to guests and used for social activities, while the inside, like the dalem, is more private and becomes a gathering place for the family. This social hierarchy is also reflected in the division of space, which shows that each individual in the house has a role and position that must be respected and maintained.

## **3. Preservation of Traditional Architecture**

The preservation of joglo houses as part of Javanese cultural heritage faces great challenges in the era of modernization and urbanization. Many joglo houses have undergone a change in function, mainly due to economic pressures and the demands of modern lifestyles. According to (Wulandari, 2018), this change has led to the erosion of the cultural values contained in the joglo house, which originally functioned as a place to live and perform rituals, now many have changed their function into commercial buildings such as restaurants or art galleries.

(Suryani, 2020) explained that to preserve joglo houses, it is necessary to carry out revitalization efforts involving all parties, both the community, the government, and the private sector. One approach that can be used is to integrate joglo houses in the cultural tourism sector. Cultural tourism can provide economic incentives while maintaining the continuity of

traditional culture by introducing joglo houses to the public, especially the younger generation who are increasingly far from traditional values.

The preservation of traditional architecture can also be done through cultural education, where the younger generation is given an understanding of the philosophy and history of joglo houses as a cultural heritage. This education can be integrated in the school curriculum to ensure that the next generation has an awareness of the importance of preserving traditional architecture as part of the cultural identity. Another effort is to restore and maintain the existing joglo house, so that it can still function according to its original purpose as a space for social and spiritual life.

### **3. METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach based on literature studies. Data was collected from various sources such as books, journals, and documents relevant to traditional Javanese architecture. The analysis process was carried out descriptively to identify the relationship between architectural design and the cultural values and spirituality of the Javanese people. The literature used includes the study of symbolism, spatial functions, and preservation efforts in the context of modernization. Case studies on several joglo houses that are still in use are also analyzed to get an idea of how people today use these traditional houses.

### **4. RESULTS**

#### **1. Symbolism in Architectural Design**

The results of the study show that each element in the design of a joglo house has a deep symbolic meaning. One of the most striking elements is the towering joglo roof. This roof not only functions as a physical protector for the occupants of the house, but also symbolizes the vertical relationship between humans and God. With its tall and towering shape, the joglo roof reflects divine protection and a representation of man's closeness to God.

In addition, the main pillar or soko guru, which is the main support of the building, plays an important role in the cosmic symbolism of the joglo house. Soko guru symbolizes cosmic balance, which is connected to the four cardinal directions, each of which has a meaning in the beliefs of the Javanese people. This main pillar serves as the center of the home world and at the same time as a symbol of the center of the spiritual life of the house's inhabitants.

The main door also has a very strong symbolic meaning in the design of the joglo house. The determination of the direction of the main door is not arbitrary, but is adjusted to the principles of local beliefs. For example, east-facing doors are thought to bring blessings and

positive energy, while west-facing ones have symbolism related to different directions of life. This shows that every aspect of joglo house design is designed with balance and harmony in mind, both physically and spiritually.

## **2. Space Layout**

The layout of a joglo house is divided into several parts, each of which has a different social and spiritual function. The pendopo, located at the front of the house, serves as an open space used for social activities and rituals. This pavilion is a more open area and can be used to receive guests or hold events together, illustrating the value of mutual cooperation in Javanese society.

In the middle of the house there is a pringgitan, which functions as a transition space between the pavilion and the interior of the house which is more private. This space is often used for art performances or as a place between guests and residents of the house. It reflects the relationship between public and private life, and signifies a clear boundary between the outside world and the family world.

Inside the house there is a dalem, which is a more closed and private living room. Dalem is used to gather with family and carry out daily activities. Senthong, which is located even deeper, is the most sacred space in the joglo house. This space is often used for meditation, the storage of heirlooms, and more in-depth religious rituals. Senthong reflects the relationship between human beings and the spiritual world and the link between daily life and spiritual life.

## **3. Challenges in Conservation**

The results of the study also show that the preservation of joglo houses faces considerable challenges in the midst of rapidly growing modernization and urbanization. Many joglo houses have lost their social and spiritual functions, with many of them converting into commercial buildings such as restaurants, hotels, or art galleries. This transformation of function leads to the loss of the close relationship between the joglo house and the cultural and spiritual values contained in it.

In addition, the development of technology and modern lifestyle also has an impact on the decline of the interest of the younger generation in the importance of preserving traditional architecture. Joglo houses, which were previously a symbol of social and spiritual life, are now increasingly rarely found as residential houses that are actively used by families. Upaya pelestarian rumah joglo menghadapi berbagai kendala, baik dari segi ekonomi, sosial, maupun budaya. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan strategi pelestarian yang integrated between the community, the government, and the private sector. One of them is by integrating joglo houses

in the cultural tourism industry which can help preserve and introduce this architecture to the younger generation and the wider community.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **1. Symbolism and Philosophy in Joglo House Architecture**

The symbolism contained in the design of the joglo house has a depth of meaning that reflects the life of the Javanese people as a whole. For example, the teacher's soko as the main pillar that supports the entire building structure symbolizes cosmic balance. This symbol not only functions as a physical support, but also describes the Javanese people's view of life which prioritizes harmony in life between humans, nature, and God. Soko guru reflects the basic principles in Javanese cosmology that view the world as an orderly system, with each element interrelated and supportive.

The philosophy of "manunggaling kawula and Gusti" which leads to an understanding of the closeness of human relations with God is also evident in the design of the joglo house. With a high roof, the joglo house represents protection and closeness to the Divine. This shows that the architecture of the joglo house does not only talk about physical function, but also serves as a medium to remind the residents of their spiritual purpose in living life.

The importance of symbolism in this design is also reflected in the direction of the main door which is designed in accordance with the philosophical values and beliefs of the Javanese people. Determining the direction of the door is not just about paying attention to the direction of the wind or lighting, but also considering the spiritual meaning related to the direction of life. Thus, the design of the joglo house serves as a spiritual reminder that always directs its residents to noble values in daily life.

### **2. Socio-Spiritual Integration in Spatial Layout**

The layout of the space in the joglo house reflects a blend of social life and spiritual life. The pavilion as an open space accommodates social interaction that is the core of Javanese society. Gotong royong, as a high social value in Javanese society, is very reflected in the use of the pendopo as a gathering place to carry out joint activities. The existence of the pendopo is an important symbol in strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and social relations between individuals in society.

Pringgitan, as a transitional space, serves to connect the more social outer world and the more private inner world. In this space, the Javanese people can express their artistic culture, such as puppet performances or other traditional events. It reflects how art and culture

are an important part of people's social lives, while also connecting the physical world with the spiritual world.

The interior of the house, especially the dalem and senthong, depicts the more private aspects of spiritual and spiritual life. Dalem as a family room underlines the value of family and harmony in the household, while senthong is the most sacred space. This space where spiritual rituals, meditation, and the storage of heirlooms are performed, is a link between daily life and a deeper spiritual life.<sup>3</sup> Challenges of Modernization and Preservation of Joglo Houses

In facing the challenges of modernization, joglo houses have undergone a significant shift in function. Many joglo houses that were previously used for residences and social and spiritual activities, are now being transformed into commercial buildings, such as restaurants or art galleries. This phenomenon illustrates the great impact of urbanization and modern lifestyle shifts that affect the preservation of cultural heritage. The preservation of joglo houses requires a holistic approach, including a better understanding from the community and the younger generation regarding the importance of the cultural and historical values contained in joglo houses. Through education and counseling, the younger generation can be given a deeper understanding of the noble values of Javanese architecture related to spirituality and social relations.

One of the solutions for the preservation of joglo houses is to develop a culture-based tourism sector. Joglo houses can be used as cultural attractions that not only introduce Javanese architecture, but also educate visitors about the spiritual and social meaning behind the design. Therefore, it is important for the government and the private sector to work together in maintaining and preserving joglo houses so that they remain relevant in the midst of the times.

Several studies also show that the revitalization of joglo houses can be done by adapting their design and function to suit modern needs without eliminating the cultural values contained in them (Santosa, 2020; Wulandari, 2018). Thus, joglo houses will not only survive as a cultural heritage, but also as a part of modern life that prioritizes harmony between traditional culture and the development of the times.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Traditional Javanese architecture, especially joglo houses, is a tangible manifestation of the cultural values, spirituality, and belief systems that have developed in Javanese society. The design of the joglo house is full of philosophical symbolism, such as soko guru, towering roofs, and space divisions that show social hierarchy, not only as a living space but also as a place to carry out various spiritual and social activities. The philosophy of "manunggaling

kawula and Gusti," which underlies the design of the joglo house, reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and God, nature, and others, which is reflected in every aspect of the spatial layout and structure of the building.

However, the challenges of modernization and urbanization have threatened the survival of this traditional Javanese architecture. Many joglo houses have lost their original function or been replaced by modern buildings that are more practical. For this reason, the preservation of joglo houses as part of Javanese cultural identity requires a more comprehensive approach, involving cultural education, revitalization through the tourism sector, and cooperation between the government, the community, and the private sector. Only with cross-sector collaboration, joglo houses can continue to be maintained, not only as a cultural heritage, but also as part of the social and spiritual life of the Javanese people in the future.

## **LIMITATION**

This article has several limitations of the problem that is the main focus of the research and discussion. These limitations are as follows:

1. **Focus on Joglo Houses:** This study only discusses the architecture of joglo houses as a representation of traditional Javanese architecture. Although Javanese architecture has many variations in the shape of houses, joglo houses were chosen because of their most recognizable existence and many reflect the cultural symbolism and spirituality of the Javanese people.
2. **Qualitative Approach and Literature Study:** This research uses a qualitative approach with literature analysis from various relevant sources. Therefore, this study does not involve field observations or case studies on joglo houses that are still used today.
3. **The Context of the Preservation of Joglo Houses in the Modern Era:** The focus of the discussion is more focused on the challenges faced in the preservation of joglo houses in the face of modernization and urbanization. The conservation efforts discussed are also limited to solutions that can be applied in the context of modernization, such as cultural education and culture-based tourism.
4. **Architectural Symbolism and Spiritual Values:** This article focuses on the relationship between symbolism in the architectural design of joglo houses and the spiritual and social values of Javanese society, without discussing in depth the influence of other belief systems that exist in Java or the change in values in contemporary Javanese society.



With these limitations, it is hoped that this article can provide a deeper understanding of the relevance of traditional Javanese architecture in the context of its cultural values, spirituality, and preservation in the modern era.

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