

## HISTORICAL TRACES OF JAVANESE SCRIPT: ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL ROLE

**Fifi Fathia<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Ray Jhon<sup>2</sup>, Sarah Clarissa Hutagalung<sup>3</sup>, Syahrani<sup>4</sup>,  
Asini Rohana Silaban<sup>5</sup>, Flores Tanjung<sup>6</sup>**

Pendidikan Sejarah, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Negeri Medan

[fififathia.3243121014@mhs.unimed.ac.id](mailto:fififathia.3243121014@mhs.unimed.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [jhonns.3242421005@mhs.unimed.ac.id](mailto:jhonns.3242421005@mhs.unimed.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>,  
[sarahclrs.3243121071@mhs.unimed.ac.id](mailto:sarahclrs.3243121071@mhs.unimed.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>, [syahrani.3241121013@mhs.unimed.ac.id](mailto:syahrani.3241121013@mhs.unimed.ac.id)<sup>4</sup>, [Asinirohanas@gmail.com](mailto:Asinirohanas@gmail.com)<sup>5</sup>,  
[flores\\_tanjung@yahoo.co.id](mailto:flores_tanjung@yahoo.co.id)<sup>6</sup>.

Received : 22 January 2025  
Revised : 31 January 2025  
Accepted : 20 February 2025

Published : 30 March 2025  
DOI : [10.54443/ijset.v4i4.719](https://doi.org/10.54443/ijset.v4i4.719)  
Link Publish : <https://www.ijset.org/index.php/ijset/index>

### Abstract

Javanese script, better known as Hanacaraka, is one of the many cultural achievements of Indonesia's ancestors. Over time, Javanese script seems to be one of the forgotten cultural achievements. As the young generation of Indonesia, we should preserve the nation's culture which is a legacy of our ancestors. For this reason, research on the historical traces of Javanese script was conducted to show the dynamics of development and the role of culture in the writing system that has become an inseparable part of the identity of the Javanese community. This research uses a qualitative approach by analyzing historical sources in the form of ancient manuscripts, inscriptions, and cultural artifacts that illustrate the transformation of Javanese writing from the royal period to the modern period.

**Keywords :** *Javanese script, Hanacaraka, cultural preservation, globalization, digitalization, cultural identity.*

### Introduction

Javanese script is a writing system that developed in the area around Java. Javanese script is included in the classification of abugida type script, namely a script where each letter represents one syllable and is segmental consisting of consonants and vowels. Before becoming Javanese script, Javanese script was formerly Kawi script (ancient Javanese script) which was derived from Pallawa script. Pallawa script is a writing system that developed in South India. During the colonial period in Indonesia, Javanese script was a writing system used to write newspapers and so on. Unlike Kawi script which was written on palm leaves, Javanese script was written on paper (Zulfana, 2022).

Javanese script, or better known as Hanacaraka, is one of the noble cultural achievements of the Indonesian nation that has been used since the kingdom era. This writing system not only reflects linguistic abilities, but also holds deep aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual values. Over time, modernization and the flow of globalization have had a significant impact on the sustainability of Javanese script, thus raising concerns about the preservation of this cultural heritage. Therefore, this study was conducted to trace the history, development, and role of Javanese script in reflecting the cultural identity of Javanese society from the past to the contemporary era.

### METHOD

In this study, the author uses a qualitative research method with a literature study approach in collecting data. This literature study was conducted by collecting relevant sources such as books, scientific articles and historical documents. The data collected is based on various references that examine history. The data used comes from credible sources and is relevant to the research topic. The data collection process is carried out through searching, selecting, and analyzing literature related to the history of Javanese script, and the role of Javanese script in the field of culture.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### History of Javanese Script

The Javanese script is believed to originate from the story of Ajisaka, who together with his two loyal servants, Dora and Sembada, went on an adventure. This story is contained in a work entitled Serat Manikmaya. In the story, Ajisaka, a Prabu, travels from Atatengin to the island of Java and succeeds in defeating the King of the Medang Kamulan Kingdom, Dewatacengkar, who is known as a very cruel figure and likes to eat human flesh. After successfully defeating the fearsome king, Ajisaka was appointed king of the Medang Kamulan Kingdom. Ajisaka had a very valuable heirloom keris located on Majethi Island. He then told his two servants, Dora and Sembada, that no one was allowed to take the keris except him. One day, when asking Dora to come to him, Ajisaka gave a mandate for Dora to take the heirloom with Sembada. However, unlike Dora, Sembada was ordered by Ajisaka to guard the keris with all his heart, remembering that only Ajisaka was allowed to have it.

Unfortunately, Ajisaka then forgot the order given to Sembada, and anger struck when he realized his mistake. He sent Dora to fight against Sembada. In the tragic battle, both loyal servants lost their lives. As a tribute to their loyalty, Ajisaka created the Javanese script to commemorate the sacrifice and loyalty of Dora and Sembada.

### The sounds of the characters are:

HĀNĀCĀRĀKĀ

DATE OF THE DAY

PĀDHĀJĀYĀNYĀ

MĀGĀBĀTHĀNGĀ

If interpreted:

HĀNĀCĀRĀKĀ - It means there is business

DĀTĀSĀWĀLĀ - Meaning not to argue

PĀDHĀJĀYĀNYĀ - Meaning the same power

MĀGĀBĀTHĀNGĀ - Means dying together

Apart from the developing folklore, the Javanese script itself is a script derived from the Brahmi script, originated from South India. This script was used by King Ashoka to write Hindu-Buddhist manuscripts. Finally, this script was used by the Brahmins to spread the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism, including to Southeast Asia. In its spread in Southeast Asia, this Brahmi script has a derivative called the Pallawa script with Sanskrit language. Examples of this Pallawa script can be found in the Mulawarman inscription and the Tarumanegara inscription. After the development of this Pallawa script, the Kawi script emerged as a derivative script and became the forerunner of the Javanese, Balinese and Sundanese scripts.

The Javanese script itself consists of 20 types of basic syllables, swara script (which marks vowels), sandhangan (punctuation marks that mark vowels), pairs (punctuation marks that function to eliminate vowels in basic script) and Javanese numbers. According to Robson (Robson, 2011), the Javanese script was actively used in everyday life and writing between the 16th and 20th centuries AD. After the Japanese occupation, this script began to be abandoned and replaced by the Latin alphabet.

The replacement of Javanese script with Latin letters has caused Javanese script to experience a decline in its use today. This is due to the difference in style/typeface between Latin letters and Javanese script. In the world of graphic design, style/typeface is a tool to convey an idea, concept or message. Style in Latin letters has uniform thickness, size and detail, in contrast to the style of Javanese script which seems monotonous, stiff and without style (Surianto, 2013). This difference in writing is one of the obstacles that makes it difficult for Javanese script to develop in the present era which is more accustomed to using Latin letters.

### The Role of Javanese Script Culture in the Present Day

Although it is very difficult to write, Javanese script is still often encouraged to be written in schools. In addition, this Javanese script also has a large cultural role in Indonesia, especially in Java. Javanese script has long served as a symbol of cultural identity that strengthens the identity of the Javanese people. In the past, this script was used in writing religious texts, literature, and state documents that showed social hierarchy and cultural values. The results of interviews with cultural experts indicate that the preservation of Javanese script is also closely related to efforts to maintain historical heritage and ethnic pride.

The story of Ajisaka with his two servants Dora and Sembada can be presented as a musical and choral performance, such as Gangsa Aksara. Gangsa Aksara is a musical and choral composition performance that displays elements of Javanese script. This Gangsa Aksara is held in a small theater in Surakarta using Surakarta style gamelan mediums, saxophone, lute, piano and cello. In this Gangsa Aksara performance, artistic elements are also used to build the atmosphere of the story of Ajisaka with his two servants, Dora and Sembada. The Gangsa Aksara performance is divided into 3 acts, namely:

- a) The first round is Cundhâkâ. This Cundhâkâ contains the meaning of HĀNĀCĀRĀKĀ and DĀTĀSĀWĀLĀ. In this round, an impression of majesty and authority is created, like the character of someone who is the king's envoy. In this part, the artist uses dignified costumes and is supported by lighting.
- b) The second half is Pralâgâ. This pralâgâ contains the meaning of PĀDHĀJĀYĀNYĀ. In this round, the impression of tension, courage and anger between two equally strong people is built. In this section, the composer plays music with a broad tone accompanied by lighting dominated by the color red.
- c) The third act is Pralâyâ. Pralâyâ contains the meaning of MĀGĀBĀTHĀNGĀ. In this act, a sad impression is built because it tells the death of Dora and Sembada.(Yatmoko, 2021). This sad impression is built by playing melodious instruments and soft lighting, typical of people who are grieving.

Next, there is the application of Javanese script to painting. This is a role because Javanese script has local wisdom. In its creation, Javanese script is deconstructed according to the planned style. The application of Javanese script to painting is not easy, it takes several stages to achieve its maturity process. According to Dharsono(Kartika, 2016), the process of creating works or artistic creations, including experimentation, contemplation, and formation (art structure). Based on the quote, the artist also added several stages in the process of creating works, starting from the search for inspiration, the idea of creation and the presentation of the work.

Starting from the inspiration stage. This inspiration comes from seeing various forms of existing calligraphy script and attending exhibitions of works with calligraphy images. After getting inspiration, the next step is to experiment. This experiment is in the form of deconstruction starting from the hanacaraka script. The next step is the idea of creation. In this idea of creation, a strong desire is needed to manage this deconstruction. In addition, the concept of embodiment, tools, materials and improvisation are needed. The last stage is presentation. In this last stage, the artist must arrange the presentation of his work according to the space provided and pay attention to the distance and balance with other works.(Fatoni, 2019).

Javanese script can also be a source for creating batik artwork. Artists can take sentences from Javanese script, such as *Urup iki Urup* which means life is on, *Narima ing Pandum* which means accepting sincerely whatever is given, and using the 3 pillars of Ki Hajar Dewantara's education, namely *Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha* which means being a role model in front, *Ing Madya Mangun Karso* which means building enthusiasm in the middle, *Tut Wuri Handayani* which means giving encouragement behind. In making it, the artist must be clever in determining the media, tools and materials and applying the design to batik.(Lukmansyah & Ratyaningrum, 2020).

### Transformation of Form and Structure of Script

The transformation of the form and structure of Javanese script is the result of a long historical journey full of cross-cultural interactions and social dynamics. Initially, Javanese script emerged from the Kawi script which was used to write inscriptions, religious manuscripts, and state documents during the ancient kingdoms in the archipelago. This Kawi script has a simple form with firm lines and a relatively static composition, reflecting the administrative and religious needs of that time. Over time, the influx of foreign cultural influences, especially from the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, brought significant changes to the aesthetics and structure of writing. This influence gave rise to a new, more complex style, in which the letterforms were refined through the addition of curves and ornaments that reflected the values of beauty and spiritual purity.

During the peak of Hindu-Buddhist influence, Javanese script began to display more dynamic artistic characteristics. The letterforms were no longer merely functional tools, but also a means to express the beauty and richness of culture. Smoother curved lines, balanced proportions, and the presence of decorations reminiscent of religious symbols became the characteristics that developed. This transformation was a response to the aesthetic demands that emerged in the palace and temple environments, where the art of calligraphy was seen as an embodiment of spirituality and grandeur. This change did not occur suddenly, but rather through a slow but consistent evolutionary process, adapting the letterforms to the needs of expression and communication in a religious and cultural context.

In addition to the transformation of form, the structure of Javanese script also underwent profound modifications. In the early stages, writing prioritized consonants with little emphasis on vowels. However, along with the development of language and the complexity of communication, innovations emerged in the form of diacritical marks or *sandhangan* to indicate vowels. This system allows writers to convey sounds more accurately without having to write vowels explicitly. The existence of this *sandhangan* shows the flexibility of Javanese script in responding to linguistic dynamics and changing communication needs. In addition, the structure of the writing is also colored by the use of pairs, namely special letter forms used to connect two consonants that meet without a

vowel in between. The use of these pairs not only simplifies the writing procedure, but also adds to the visual beauty of the arrangement of letters, resulting in a harmonious and consistent appearance.

The entry of Islamic influence into the Java region in the later period also gave its own color to the transformation of the script. With this influence, several aspects of the writing style shifted, both in form and structure, to be more in line with new religious values and symbolism. This change took place gradually, where adjustments to form and the addition of new aesthetic elements were made to accommodate the development of the times without eliminating the existing cultural identity. This transformation reflects the ability of the Javanese script to adapt and develop, remaining relevant amidst the currents of modernization and globalization.

### The Role of Technology in Preserving Javanese Script

Digital technology has played a crucial role in preserving Javanese script, especially in this modern era. Through the digitization process, ancient manuscripts and historical documents containing Javanese script can be converted into digital format, making them more accessible and protected from physical damage. This initiative allows libraries and cultural archives to store digital copies that can be accessed by researchers, students, and the general public around the world.(Alfian, 2014).

Digitization has also encouraged the creation of online databases that collect information, images, and transcriptions of historical manuscripts, enriching learning resources about the Javanese script and facilitate cross-disciplinary research. In addition, the implementation of mobile applications and e-learning platforms has changed the way people, especially the younger generation, learn Javanese script. Interactive educational applications that present materials in the form of videos, animations, and interesting practice questions make the learning process more enjoyable and easier to understand.

Through digital media, information about Javanese script is not only limited to books or manuscripts, but is also spread through websites, blogs, and social media. This allows for faster exchange of information and collaboration between experts, practitioners, and enthusiasts of Javanese culture, who share knowledge and experiences with each other. Technology also opens up opportunities for virtual exhibitions and digital museums that display collections of manuscripts and cultural artifacts online. In this way, the public can access the rich history of Javanese script without having to visit a physical museum or archive.

Innovation in the field of written character recognition, such as the use of artificial intelligence and Optical Character Recognition (OCR), greatly assists in the digitization process by automating the recognition and transcription of text from ancient manuscripts. This initiative not only accelerates the preservation process, but also increases the accuracy and efficiency of historical data processing. Thus, digital technology has become a bridge connecting traditional cultural heritage with the modern era, ensuring that Javanese script remains alive and relevant for today's society and future generations.(Mulyato, Susanti, Rossi, Wajiran, & Borman, 2021).

### Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that Javanese script is a cultural heritage that has very important historical, aesthetic, and cultural values. The transformation of script from the Kawi period to the modern form illustrates the evolution that occurs as a result of the dynamic interaction between external cultural influences and local needs. Javanese script not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural identity that connects past generations with the present.

The challenges of globalization and modernization have indeed shifted the dominance of the use of traditional scripts. However, innovative efforts through digitalization and integration in formal education have paved the way for revitalization. The synergy between tradition and technology is key to maintaining the relevance of Javanese script amidst the changing times. Therefore, the preservation of Javanese script needs to involve an interdisciplinary and participatory approach, involving all stakeholders, from the government, educational institutions, to local communities.

Finally, success in preserving Javanese script not only affects the cultural aspect, but also plays a role in enriching historical literacy and increasing pride in national identity. Therefore, the strategy for developing preservation should include increasing the integration of Javanese script in the education curriculum, supporting digitalization programs, and organizing cultural activities that involve the wider community.

### Suggestion

Efforts to preserve Javanese script are carried out comprehensively through collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and cultural communities. Integrating Javanese script into the formal education curriculum is a very important strategic step. In this case, the creation of interactive learning modules

and training for educators can help the younger generation to recognize and appreciate the historical and aesthetic values contained in the script. Through this approach, Javanese script is not only taught as a symbol of cultural heritage, but also as a medium to develop creativity in the fields of art, literature, and communication.

### REFERENCES

- Alfian, E. (2014). Penggunaan Unsur Aksara Nusantara pada Huruf modern. *Jurnal Komunikasi Visual*, 42-48.
- Fatoni, F. M. (2019). Dekonstruksi Aksara Jawa Sebagai Subject Matter Dalam Penciptaan Karya Seni Lukis. *Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 1-8.
- Kartika, D. S. (2016). Kreasi Artistik, Penjumpaan Tadisi Modern dalam Paradigma Kekaryaannya Seni. Surakarta: Citra Sain.
- Lukmansyah, D. R., & Ratyaningrum, F. (2020). Aksara Jawa Sebagai Sumber Ide Penciptaan Karya Seni Batik. *Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 73-79.
- Mulyato, A., Susanti, E., Rossi, F., Wajiran, W., & Borman, R. I. (2021). Penerapan Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) pada Pengenalan Aksara Lampung Berbasis Optical Character Recognition (OCR). *Jurnal Edukasi dan Penelitian*, 52-57.
- Robson, S. O. (2011). Javanese script as Cultural Artifact: Historical background. *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*.
- Surianto, R. (2013). Huruf Font Tipografi. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Yatmoko, R. (2021). "Gångså Aksårå" : Ekspresi Musikal Dalam Makna Aksara Jawa. *Jurnal Etmusikologi*, 49-73.
- Zulfana, H. D. (2022). Perancangan Buku Visual Sejarah Aksara Jawa Sebagai Alternatif Media Referensi untuk Mahasiswa Jurusan Bahasa Jawa. Surabaya: Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November.