

Javanese kings, dramas, and women

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ジャワの王，演劇，そして女

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Introduction

Many Indonesiaologists have discussed the politics, society, and history of Indonesia based on cultural approaches. Anderson 1990 discussed how Javanese kings had constructed their system of justification of being the kings, based on their culturally unique concept of Javanese power, and heightened their cultural prestige.

This paper will discuss how the Javanese kings, above all the current king, called Sultan, Raja, Hamengkubuwana IX and X, have justified their legitimacy as the right kings of Java, based on our analysis of the concept of Javanese power discussed by Anderson before, and on my own extensive fieldwork of the 1980s in which I interviewed the king, princes and princesses, court servants, ex-court dancers, as well as people outside of the court.

Historically, the scholarly approach to Java has been based on cultural approach, from which post-colonialism and orientalism came into existence, and later developed to Anderson's discussion of imagined communities, in which Anderson discusses cultural hegemony. In his concept of power, Anderson discussed Javanese concepts of power as follows:

1. There is no Javanese word for power which is equivalent to the English 'power.' Probably the closest term to the English power will be

sakti or *kasekten*.

2. *Kasekten* is a fundamental/proto power which constructs this universe, the world of human beings and the world of nature. Furthermore, *kasekten* keeps this universe in order.
3. *Kasekten* exists all over the universe, and the amount of the *kasekten* is always the same. Its substance is not good or bad.
4. The Javanese concept of power is this substance called *kasekten* and the power and legitimacy of the king rests on this *kasekten*.
5. Therefore, the power and legitimacy of the king is abstract and vague. In other words, there are not various sources of legitimacy for the power of kings.
6. The total amount of *kasekten* remains the same. The order and stability of the universe, nature, and the world of human beings can be kept only when the *kasekten* is centered. On the other hand, when the *kasekten* is scattered or broken from the center, and each amount of *kasekten* is scattered throughout the universe, order will be destroyed and then chaos will start.
7. The one who can keep much *kasekten* in himself is the owner of the Javanese power, and can be the founder of the kingdom
8. The concentration of *kasekten* can be realized through asceticism. This act is an act of self-control through yoga and *samadi* (meditation).

As a result of this asceticism with which they control their *pamrih* (individual desire) they can reach the situation of *tata tentrem-karta raharja*, i.e. order, calmness, and peace.

On the other hand, as described by a Javanese court poet Ronggowarsita, the history of Java could be divided into two types of eras, i.e. the time of order and the time of chaos. They are:

djaman mas - The Golden Period

djaman edan - The Mad Period.

According to Javanese, the current period is in that of the Mad Period. Human beings live, suffering, agonized in this chaotic world, that is, a micro-cosmos of the universe. However, when the Mad Period ends, and the *kasekten* is concentrated, then comes the Golden Period, and the king *Ratu Adil* (The king of justice) reigns the world. The Golden Period is the period of peace and prosperity.

Based on the concept of power, the Javanese kings have constructed complex and sophisticated cultural devices. They are:

1. The king and his space, i.e. the court is located at the center of the concentric circles.

Javanese society is perceived as concentric circles, of which the center is the king, and the space where Sultan sits, that is the court, is called *kraton*. These concentric circles extend from the center, i.e. the king, the court, towns surrounding the court, the city, and outside of the city.

This concept of society is not just symbolic but also substantial, that is, there is an obvious correspondence between the concentric circles and actual city and its superb.

2. The names of four Javanese courts

At the center of the universe sits the king. However, in current Java, by the end of 18th century, with Dutch interference in the court, the court was divided into two, i.e. the Yogyakarta court of

Hamengkubuwana and the Surakarta Court of Pakubuwana. Later each of the courts was further divided into two, i.e. Hamengkubuwana and Pakualam of Yogyakarta, and Pakubuwana and Mangkunegara of Surakarta. All the names of the kingdoms represent themselves as the center of the universe. As a result, from a conceptual point of view, the Javanese cosmos now has four centers, which might mean the chaos of the universe. However, this conceptual chaos seems to have been avoided under the historical explanation, i.e. the Hamengkubuwana court of Yogyakarta is the legitimate kingdom, because the first king, Hamengkubuwana I fought against the Dutch colonizer, and separated from the original kingdom called Mataram, then set up the line of the Yogyakarta court. The original Mataram was continued by the Pakualam family and the king of Pakualam has been called *susushunan*, "those who are highly respected."

Table 1. Javanese four kingdoms

Surakarta courts:

Hamengkubuwana 'The lap of the land'

Pakualam 'The nail of the universe'

Yogyakarta courts:

Mangkunegara 'The lap of the nation'

Pakubuwana 'The nail of the land'

3. The genealogy

The Javanese genealogy has been continued from God of almighty until the current Javanese kings. In the text of Javanese shadow puppet players, the Javanese genealogy is described as follows:

Sang Hyang Tunggal (God of Almighty)

Adam

Betara Guru (Hindu God of Shiva)

Dharma

Semar (Clown servant)

Bayu (Hindu God of Wind)

Hanuman (demi god, white monkey appearing in Ramayana Epic)

Arjuna (Hero in Mahabharata Epic)

Moses

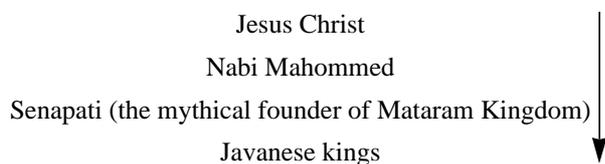


Table 2. Ancestors for Javanese kings

In other words, Javanese kings are transcendent, covering all the deities of major religions. Instead of the spiritual affiliation, this genealogy explains the consanguine affiliations between God almighty, the god of Judeo-Christianity, Hindu gods, Buddha's, prophets, Jesus, and Muhammad.

Religious as well as historical figures have been well explained and combined under the Javanese tolerance. For Javanese, differences of religion are not significant, but any religious aspects can be explained logically under the idea that an invisible God created everything including Hindu gods, the trinity, spirits and souls. This aspect has been called the 'tolerance of Javanese,' as Anderson puts it.

4. The mystical and spiritual power of women.

The spiritual power of women is represented in several forms, again in order to legitimize the power of the king.

4.1. Marriage with Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, The goddess of the South Ocean

It is believed that from the time of the founding of Javanese kingdom, the kings are married to the Goddess of the South Sea, called Kanjeng Ratu Kidul (The Southern Goddess). She is the spiritual protector for the Javanese kingdom as well as people of all Java. Every year in each court, the wedding ceremony with the Kanjeng Ratu Kidul is performed in the form of a dance called *bedhaya ketawan*, a dance performed by 9 young women. This dance has been performed especially in the Surakarta court of the kingdom of Pakubuwana to claim the legitimacy of the kingship. I will discuss this *bedhaya ketawan* and another female dance later.

Meanwhile in Yogyakarta, there is a ritual in which an enormous amount of food offerings is

presented in the form of *kendhuren*, the communal banquet, then another amount of food symbolic of the king's souls is offered. The round rice power breads, each of which is considered to represent the soul of the king, are arranged in the form of the king's body, that is, the head, neck, torso, arms, and legs.

The final ritual of food offering is conducted on the Parangtritis Beach. The food is offered to the sea from the beach, starting with prayers and incense burning. The whole ritual is called Garebeg. A month before the Garebeg, the North Square in front of the court has a festive atmosphere. Every night amusement park and food stalls are open, yielding the *ramai* 'crowded, lively' atmosphere. On the morning of Garebeg, there is a procession of the offerings in a form of a steep mountain, from the court kitchen outside of the court fence, to the court, accompanied by court servants and militaries. Thousands of spectators gather along the street, forming a huge state ritual.

As Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, the Goddess of the South Sea is not only the protector of the Javanese kingdom but could also be the destroyer of the universe. She is easy to make angry, jealous, and to explode, so that in order to avoid chaos and keep the peace of Java, a huge amount of offerings should be presented.

4.2. Wayang stories: Arjuna and his women

The majority of the Javanese shadow puppet stories are from the Mahabharata, differently from others, especially about the third son of the Pandawa family, called Arjuna or Janaka. The Pandawa family had to fight never-ending wars with the Kurawa family, Pandawa's cousins. In one of their most significant stories, called Arjuna Wiwaha, Arjuna's wedding ceremony, the Pandawa's third son Arjuna goes for asceticism under the name Mintaraga, and overcomes any kind of seduction and desire. As asceticism, Arjuna is given the most powerful and spiritual weapon, called Senapati from the king of gods, Bethara Guru (God of Shiva). With that weapon, Arjuna succeeds in beating the Kurawa family in the most significant battle, and brings about victory to his family which later continued to be the Mataram kingdoms and then the current Javanese kingdoms.

Arjuna also owes his victory to his two wives, Sumbadra and Srikandi. These two women represent two opposite sides of character, i.e. the elegance and motherhood of Sumbadra and the strength and courage of Srikandi as a woman warrior. Sumbadra appears as an ideal mother and wife in the background, while Srikandi appears as the ideal warrior, who helps her husband on the battlefield. Furthermore, Arjuna receives 800 celestial wives as gifts for attaining the ultimate goal of asceticism. As a result, Arjuna is considered the ultimate ruler of Java, the ancestor of Javanese kingdom. The winner of the weapon as well as many women is the one who has legitimacy for ruling the kingdom of Java - this is how the Javanese court has reconfirmed their power, and has also succeeded in making the Javanese people believe in it.

4.3. Physical appearance and inner control

Furthermore, this spiritual power manifests itself in appearance. For those who have *kasekten*, it appears in the ultimate beauty - the beauty specific to Java; that is, an extremely slender body, looking down, well-down to the earth, and speak in a low voice, manifestations of their control over emotion. Those who have physical power but lack spiritual power end up being losers. The simple dichotomy of men of being controlled and men of being uncontrolled can be described as follows:

Table 3. *alus:kasar::beauty:ugliness*

Appearance	Moral	Ability	Behavior
beautiful	high	control of desire	<i>alus</i>
ugly	low	uncontrolled	<i>kasar</i>

Beauty of appearance = good mind, goodness, spiritually high Alus behavior

Ugliness of appearance = lack of control over desire, e.g. sexual desire, appetite, anger, or excitement

Kasar behavior

4.4. Garebeg and Wayang Wong

Wayang wong was supposed to have been created by Hamengkubuwana in the end of the 1750s, in order to justify himself as the only ruler of Mataram. Wayang wong is the personified form of *wayang*,

shadow puppet plays. According to Soedarsono, *wayang wong* is the state ritual which boasted the wealth and majesty of the kingdom, as opposed to the orthodox Surakarta, and was also the opportunity at which the king himself appeared as the incarnation of Visnu, who came down to the world in order to maintain the prosperity of the world of human beings (Soedarsono 1984).

Unlike other performance, Wayang Wong used to start in the morning, and the Sultan watched it, sitting in Bangsal Kencana, the Golden Hall, facing east, where the Sun rises as the incarnation of the Sun God. Court servants also sit watching the Wayang Wong expecting to be able to receive *berkat*, blessing from the king. Occasionally in the past, some *lakon*, a certain repertoire, was intentionally chosen in order to cynically describe historical incidents caused by Dutch colonization.

4.5. Female dances: Bedhaya and Srimpi

4.5.1. Bedhaya

Bedhaya is danced by nine young women in identical costumes, make-up, and hairdos. There are several *bedhayas*, but above all, *bedhaya ketawan* in the Surakarta court is most significant in the sense that it is the most secret and one of the court's important *pusaka*, heirlooms. The dance movement is considered to represent various forms of yoga as a way to control desire. According to Soedarsono and Brongtodingrat, an ethnomusicologist and scholar of dance studies, the whole movement for these hours represent each Yoga movement, the control of *cakras* of the human body.

The dance *bedhaya ketawan* has been performed in the Pakubuwana Court of Surakarta each year. Like other court dances, the dance is accompanied by gamelan music as well as songs, but unlike other court dances, its music and the appearance of female singers is extremely simple. The music has no decorative tunes, complicated rhythms, or decorative music instruments such as flutes or *gambang*, *celempung*, or *rebab*, but rather repetitions of a main theme. The performance currently lasts for three hours, although it used to be danced for seven hours. The hall, *bangsal kecana*, the golden hall, has jasmine flower petals

scattered all over the floor, and incense is burned. The hall is full of fragrance. This is the only occasion on which the Sultan as well as his whole family attends the dance performance as one of the most sacred and significant rituals of the year.

According to Babad Ninik, a Javanese court archive, both compositions were created by Sultan Agung (1613-46). The dance is performed by 9 young women, each of them named as a human body part as shown in Figure 1.

Bedhaya ketawan

1. *endhel*

heart
represents desires emerging from the
heart

2. *batak*

head
head with the mind or soul

3. *jangga*

neck

4. *apit ngajeng*

right arm

5. *apit wingking*

left arm

6. *dhadha*

chest

7. *endhel wedalan ngajeng*

right leg

8. *endhel wedalan wingking*

left leg

9. *buntil*

sexual organ

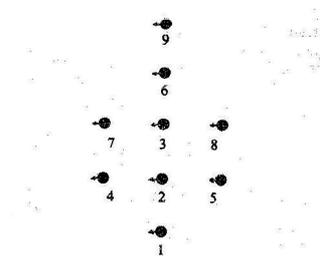


Figure 1. Bedhaya dance movement
(Soedarsono 1984:81)

The leading roles are danced by *batak*, representing mind or soul, and *endhel*, desires. Many times they face each other, although other dancers are making a line behind other *endhel* or *batak*. The prince Brontodiningrat states that the fight between *endhel* (desires) and *batak* (human mind) is a natural thing in human beings. According to him, in this world there are only two opposite characters in human life, i.e. good and bad, right and wrong, and the ideal goal of man is to conquer the bad, which will result in the ideal life. Soedarsono interprets Brongtodiningrat's statement as follows:

Man as macro-cosmos has always two opposite characters which should be in harmony. Human desires must be in balance with the human mind, otherwise disorder would result which would affect the Macro-cosmos (Soedarsono 1984:81).

The nine elements of the *Bedhaya* dance also represent nine orifices of human bodies, i.e., mouth, a pair of eyes, nostrils, ears, sexual organ, and anus.

Four elements of Srimpi Dance

1. *grama*

fire

2. *angin*

wind

3. *toya*

water

4. *bumi*

earth

The theme of the *Srimpi* also symbolizes two opposites, the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, or the human mind and the human desires. It should be noted, however, in *Srimpi*, clearly the two pairs never separate and cross with each other. The music is more flamboyant, and when the dancers reach the hall, marching music, obviously an influence of Western marching bands, accompanies their entrance. When the first part of the music ends, there always starts a fighting movement in which the dancers take out their own daggers and start stabbing the partner.

Currently, as the *Srimpi* dancers are often invited to perform outside of the court to perform, for example, to welcome VIPs or to celebrate high government officers' daughters' wedding ceremonies, the daggers are often replaced with large flowers.

4.6. Keputren: women's section of the court

Until the end of the second world war there have been always court dancers called *bedhayas* - they were mainly daughters of the court servants and aristocrats' daughters in the city - when they turned 6 years old, and when there was a vacancy, a girl was added to the group of dancers keeping their number at 40 at all times. They all lived in the Keputren, in the west side of the court, an obvious contrast of men's space, with the sun rising in the east and women's sun setting in the west. At ceremonies accompanied by dance, the king as well as the princes watched their dances of *Bedhaya* or *Srimpi*. The dancers used to wait for the time when they would be picked up. Their ultimate target was to be picked up by the king, secondly by *pangeran*, the king's sons, then by high-ranking court servants. Naturally, to be chosen as a dancer one should be pretty, fair skinned, and well behaved.

Being asked how she felt when she was "picked up" as Sultan Hamengkubuwana's second wife, Queen Hastungkoro answered, 'Of course I was so happy.' Later she became the First Queen because of her first son, The Prince Mangkubumi's coronation as the current king, Sultan Hamengkubuwana X.

However, Florida reports a tragic suicide of the First Queen of the Surakarta court who killed herself when her husband, Pakubuwana IX, took a low-born second queen, by swallowing a diamond (Florida 1996). The Javanese stories, everyday conversation, indeed, are filled of stories of jealousy, black magic and white magic, and suicides because 'di-madu', i.e. husbands taking of another wife.

5. Conclusion: post-colonialism, orientalism, and studies of Java

As mentioned above, the Javanese culture, especially that of the court, has been treated from a cultural point of view, emphasizing its mysticism,

mysteriousness, elegantism, exoticism, and finally orientalism. The discourse of Javanese culture was the ultimate target for this approach. The court dance drama, dance, and texts have been described, explained, interpreted, and analyzed by both natives as well as international scholars from cultural approaches. However, current studies such as Tsuchiya 1991, Florida 1996, Anderson 1996, and Pemberton 1994 explain that those descriptions have been the products of Dutch scholarly trends-Dutch theosophy, philosophy as well as structuralist anthropologists who later became the basis for the anthropological structuralism of Levi-Strauss. Tsuchiya's rereading of the National Hero, a Javanese aristocrat woman Raden Ajeng Kartini, who became the Mother of Modern Time in the Dutch East Indies, was interesting because it showed that her brilliant writings for modern emancipation was the product of Dutch modernism as well as Dutch mysticism which prevailed at the beginning of the 20th century. Likewise, Florida's excellent work on Javanese court texts also shows that Dutch contribution to the Javanese tradition was great, but connotes that even Ronggowarsito's poems owe to the Dutch trend at that time.

Even for Pemberton 1987, 1994, the gamelan music has been used in order to assert Javanese to be passive and controlled. Playing and interpreting Javanese gamelan was to harmonize Javanese people with feudalism and then Dutch colonialism.

Javanese women, especially court women, in this way, were colonized and politicized, and as a result became the central part of discourse of esoteric Javanese. Their spiritual power represented in the mythology surrounding the Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, the goddess of Southern Ocean, and wayang stories, and then manifested in dances such as *bedhaya ketawan* and *bedhaya* girls, i.e. court dancers, have been controlled and muted and thus became mysterious. Although post-modern studies and theories of deconstructions help us to understand those inner parts of cultural phenomena, as Stange 1990 suggests, Javanese philosophy, concept of power, mysticism, etc. are not just products of Western, Dutch theosophy.

Under the term post-modern, in Javanology's case,

the indigenous theory is dismissed and then appropriated without acknowledgement' (Stange 1990: 100). Here I suggest, talking about the Javanese kingdoms, the philosophy behind them, and women, who are also behind them, that they have complex layers of Hindu cosmology and pre-Hindu based indigenous thoughts, and Western philosophy, theosophy, and anthropology. Studying Javanese provides us with such an opportunity to explore these complex ramifications.

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