

THE ARCHITECTURE OF *OMAH* AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE BEAUTY OF JAVANESE CULTURE

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Abstract—Javanese people believe that between "containers" with "content" required the balance, alignment, and even harmony that created peace of mind, prosperity in welfare, and prosperity in life. The harmony between the container and the content is symbolized by the existence of the unity concept of the microcosm (human) with the macrocosm (the universe). This paper is intended to reveal the consciousness of Javanese people over the *omah* (Javanese traditional house) and symbolic meaning of local Javanese wisdom that is loaded with morality and spirituality of life through the expression of *omah* as an expression of the beauty of Javanese culture. Uncovering consciousness is like unpacking discourse. What is done or discussed in the discourse, as is the case with the architecture of *omah*, is always the will and power, which in this case is dissected using qualitative methods and descriptive qualitative and interpretive data analysis techniques that use a hermeneutic approach. The results of this study are two conclusions. *Firstly*, Javanese people put local wisdom into an important part in building the architectural identity of their residence which developed according to Javanese metaphysics and culture itself. *Secondly*, in Javanese architecture, especially in *omah* buildings, the symbol of inherent local wisdom is something that has functional and life value, even as an expression of the beauty of Javanese culture which embodies the philosophical message of Javanese view of life.

Keywords—discourse, local wisdom, Javanese architecture

I. INTRODUCTION

Omah is the Javanese word that is commonly used to refer to a house or place to live. The existence of the *Omah Java* is commonly considered as a part of traditional Javanese architecture that is an ancient cultural product because of its existence is so bound to the past. Unlike the houses that are built with modern architecture in which because of its novelty is often interpreted as an architecture that is in line with the human tastes that always want everything completely new, including in the design and construction field of houses or residences.

The novelty in the happening changes is a part of directed change and planning change. It means that modernization is directed and planned to change the paradigm of society's life, from traditional society into modern society. As is commonly understood that modern humans are people who are able to function effectively in a

nation that is experiencing economic growth; able to participate in making a political decision; also behaving and its decision arranged based on rational norms. Modern life which is seen as a character of advanced society, in the end, becomes an ideology fought by social institutions, such as government bureaucracy, capitalist groups, even the tradition agency. The strong charm of modern life has made modernity as a hegemonic discourse that seizes society's consensus in interpreting and living their lives, including in interpreting and creating their living space materials (architecture) [1].

This taste is in line with human nature that always moves forward into the future. Therefore, in the art of design and construction, the modern architecture seems to have succeeded to build the new awareness and dominated the awareness of the traditional Javanese architecture. As a result, almost every activity of Javanese architecture is oriented in the Western world, where the modern culture originates. If the dominance of the awareness of modern architecture is allowed to further develop in the Javanese people minds, then the Javanese design and construction arts will have difficulty to managing their life, even possibly experiencing extinction.

The artistic value contained in Javanese architecture, especially in *omah* architecture, essentially derives from goodness-value; and goodness-values come from truth-value. It is important to realize that the truth is not only found in something new but also in the past and tradition. Even truth is spread out throughout human experience, not only determined by the reason and rationale found in positivist logocentrism that has affirmed the truth as 'paradoxical'. At this point, it is important to discuss the expression of Javanese cultural beauty in Javanese living house (*omah*) architecture by giving the balanced portion and position between Javanese and Modern architecture in the present context. Therefore, in this article, it is considered important and relevant to bring up the discussion about the discourse of Javanese human awareness toward *omah* or its residence and the symbolic meaning of local wisdom of Javanese culture which is full of moralities and live spiritualities in the expression of *omah* or Javanese residence.

The study of *omah* as a Javanese architecture product uses qualitative methods and data analysis techniques in descriptive qualitative and interpretative ways that use a hermeneutic approach. However, the data are analyzed using Foucault's Discourse theory as the main theory to discuss two research problems which were assisted by three other theories which were used eclectically, such as (a) Giddens's Structural theory; (b) Eco's Visual Communication Semiotics theory; and (c) Jauss's Reception theory.

II. THE DISCOURSE OF JAVANESE HUMAN AWARENESS ON *OMAH*

As conscious beings, humans know that they know something is about something. It is proofed by their thinking and communication abilities. Thinking is talking inside our heart, while communicating is talking between subjects. Considering both are speech acts emphasizing on the word used so that it can be ascertained that such activities always use language. Furthermore, humans can understand each other and realize the understanding among themselves. This mutual understanding and comprehension are what is meant by awareness in which language becomes a tool and its consciousness manifestation. When language is accepted as collective awareness of human societies, humans have created discourse in their own world. It is in line with Paul Ricoeur opinions about the discourse process that starts from the meaning of an object until formed the relationship between predicates [2].

Furthermore, Foucault explains that 'discourse' is a way of generating knowledge along with social practices that accompany it, the subjectivity formed from it, the power relations behind the knowledge, and its social practices also the interrelationship between all aspects. He asserted that when a discourse was born, then the discourse is actually controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to the author's will because that discourse was constructed based on certain (episteme) rules. Therefore, the truth has links with the power system [3].

Meanwhile, language as a discourse is not solely discussing speech and or writing, but every cultural statement because the whole statement is a text that contains certain values, prerequisites, ideologies, truths, and objectives. It is similar with architectural language that not only discussing about lines and fields, even not only discussing about the Trinity rules of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio which is a synthesis between power (durability or firmness), usefulness (convenience or utility), and beauty (beauty or *venustas*), but more on the expression of will and power that are in the human's awareness area [4].

In human consciousness, will and power are the reflections of human desire. The human with its desire has developed architecture into design and construction knowledge that is not only limited by areas and *gatra* (something that seems materialized) or lines and fields. However, architecture has evolved to explore the human consciousness area further into the niches of beauty which are then positioned into ideal values [5]. This beauty is the human language that is conveyed through architecture media with its elements, with both materials and form and its composition. That is how architectural language always present the beauty value with full of honesty and

reasonableness, as mentioned by Thomas Aquinas, '*pulchrum splendor est veritatis*', 'beauty is the emanation of truth' [6]. In this context, there is a Javanese terminology that says *bener iku kudu pener, lire jumbuh klawan empan papan* (right should be precise, it means it should be appropriate with space and time). This terminology implies that a truth, for Javanese humans, is something fragmented, that is cut into pieces according to space and time so that human must remain in harmony with their space to always draw closer to the truth to maintain the beauty value itself. This beauty is then commonly expressed in three ways, such as (a) form and scale; (b) balance and stability; and (3) rhythm and poetry [7].

Javanese human in their consciousness understands that beauty as the ideal value as a sense that can be sensed as a sensitivity to the physical environment (including *omah* as their residence). This can be clearly traced from the word *omah* that is derived from two words, *om* which is defined as space and male feature (fatherly) and *mah* which is interpreted as soil (land) and female feature (motherly). Therefore, *omah* is interpreted as a miniature of the human universe which consists of *Bapa Angkasa* and *Ibu Pertiwi* [8]. This reality shows us about Javanese human understanding of duality, the existence of two dichotomous elements, two contradictory elements that must always harmonized. That is a natural phenomenon in Javanese culture that included gender elements into the duality symbolic system, *lingga* and *yoni*, which are masculine and feminine.

The sincerity of Javanese humans to maintain the balance and harmony between microcosm and macrocosm in determining its living space material not only realized in the use of *omah* terminology for a house, but more on the use of symbols in almost all parts related to the house itself, both in material and its behavioral symbols.

The material symbols referred in here is for physical things and can be sensually touched, including spatial patterns and building a mass layout, patterns of building embodiment forms, the use of building materials, and the attached ornaments' design. Whereas for the behavioral symbol is matters related with the actions of Javanese human relating to the construction of their house, including the rituals, inner practices, and *gugon tuhon* that participate in the process of building a house. The example of the symbols are, *bedah bumi* rituals as a sign of the starting of soil excavation for the house's foundation, or the *munggah penuwun* rituals for beginning to install the top wooden block of a roof.

The above description of the reality is at least able to show that the local wisdom contained in the Javanese architecture as a cultural form has its own metaphysics built on the owner consciousness and discourse. In this case, the awareness of Javanese human can be examined deeply from the consciousness tools which are mother tongue. Considering that mother tongue is a source of social morality and at the same time as the discourse constructor, even as the reflection of life philosophy, that is life guidelines and life behavior. In the context of Javanese architecture, the mother tongue of architecture is the local wisdom. This is what manifests itself in the socio-cultural

word into values, including the beauty values in the expression of Javanese *omah* which is full of philosophies and attitudes of Javanese humans. It can be seen clearly in the meaning of *omah* (house) as the Javanese architecture products that are commonly known as the shelter's architecture. As Kawruh Kalang said that, "*tiyang sumusup ing griya punika saged kaupamekaken ngaub ing sangandhaping kajeng ageng*" which means, 'people who enter the house is like sheltering under a large tree (intention)' [9].

"Sheltering" is a temporary activity. It seems that this expression is a description of Javanese's human point of view about their life journey until their final destination of life. Regarding this life journey, Javanese human has a traditional expression, "*urip iku sak drema mampir ngombe*" (life is a stopping for a drink). It means, for Javanese human, *omah* (house) is the living space material which is a miniature of this temporary life, just to take shelter and rest, toward "the great intentions" (the end of human life journey in perfection) *manunggaling kawula Gusti* or return to the Sang Kuasa Mutlak [10].

III. THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF *OMAH* JAVA BEHIND THE EXPRESSION OF JAVANESE CULTURAL BEAUTY

As the creation reality, *omah* as the Javanese architecture product is a masterpiece, noble and sophisticated if seen from the philosophical aspect, the balance rules between function and construction, climatology, user density and area, material composition, proportion, appearance, bold ornament lines, until the color's meaning. It shows that *omah* becomes the cultural products that are full of beauty values encapsulate local wisdom, and the objective values of life philosophical, and therefore observed. This is also why the architecture of *omah* has the ability to communicate through the attached signs. In the sense that the architectural signs that build *omah* are denotative and connotative according to the codes. If the symbolism values of Javanese architecture in form of *omah* lies in the way it conveys the meaning of the certain form of a building that contains a weight of expression (signifier) and weight of meaning (signified), then the intended expression weight is reflected in the realization of its architecture. The weight of expression includes space and its surface (façade), while the weight of meaning is the media consist of contents or messages that need to be conveyed.

The weight of the expression reflected in the embodiment of the architecture and the weight of the meaning that contains the content or message to be conveyed in truth is a reflection of the knowledge that is believed to be true and the worldly desire that is always sought for fulfillment. This means that the expression of *omah*, which is a product of Javanese architecture, is not only a physical architectural problem but also a debate over knowledge and efforts to fulfill the desires and passions of human tastes. The presence of an *omah* in its environment is a representation of its owner which can then be used as an object or text that is read in the surrounding context. Acceptance of society and the environment for the presence of an *omah* is nothing but power over the knowledge and will of the owner.

In the Javanese architecture, especially in *omah* building, the attached local wisdom symbol is something that has functional values and is alive, even as the expression of Javanese cultural beauty. As long as the local wisdom in the symbol of Javanese architecture is still alive, it means that the symbols are the expression of something that cannot be marked with a more appropriate sign. This shows that a symbol only lives as long as this symbol has meaning for the majority of humans. In this case symbol is something that belongs to others so that the symbol becomes social that alive and its influence giving a life.

Javanese humans believe that between "containers" and "content" is needed balance, alignment, even cohesion so as to create inner peace, welfare, and prosperity of life and living. The alignment between container and content is symbolized with the existence of the unity concept between microcosm (human) and macrocosm (universe) [11]. The unity concept of microcosm and macrocosm means that humans established a relationship with a power beyond themselves that is much greater so that the concerned human will be awake and able to increase their strength to a greater extent that eventually will bring welfare, fertility, and other positive things for life and human life [12]. The belief about the existence of a power beyond the human body, not only power comes from God, but also supra-natural powers in this universe. This belief always places humans as the center (*pancer*) surrounded by four wind corners (*keblat papat*) is not moving (steady), however, moves (dynamic power). This Javanese belief that eventually gives birth to the terminology of *papat keblat kalima pancer* is known as Pajupat [13].

The Javanese human understanding about *omah* as their residence which combined with Pajupat concept can be illustrated as follows (Figure 1).

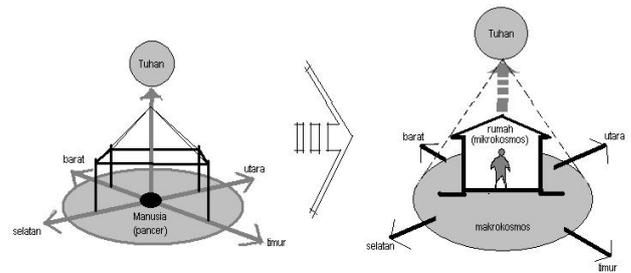


Figure 1. The Figure of The House as a miniature of cosmos [14].

To present structure as a power symbol (masculine) of *omah* building which is related with the awareness of its living space material, Javanese human takes the starting point of *omah* realization by setting the size of *balandar* and *pangeret* which is known as *pamidhangan*. *Balandar* and *pangeret* are the series of blocks placed on top of *saka* (column poles) [15]. It means that Javanese humans do not specify the building size by pointing part of the building below but that is above the head as their starting point. Therefore, *saka* then becomes the sitting support for *balandar-pangeret*, not as the connector of the aligned *saka* in two rows side by side, nor a structural part of the structural series of blocks-poles. In the above of *balandar-pangeret* there are types of roof, *tajug*, *juglo* (commonly

known as *joglo*), *limansap* (commonly known as *limasan*) or *kapung* (commonly known as *kampung*) which later becomes the term or name for the Javanese's building form. This roof also holds the main task as the shelter and shade for *balandar-pangeret*. The first roof is the shelter and shade for *balandar-pangeret*, not a hollow shelter and shade formed from a row of *saka*. According to Prijotomo, in this roof, the owner's need for the use of building that they will have depends, for example, on the use for *dalem* and *gandhok* [16].

The roof not only regards the owner's need for the usage of the building, but also the owner's desire becomes the realization elements. Therefore, the use of the four types of roofs has undergone various developments following the needs and desires of its building owner. The roof shape becomes the symbol of social status, nobility or ordinary. The nobility tends to prioritize their satisfaction (desire) and ordinary people tend to prioritize the functions (needs) [17]. The embodiment of *tumpang sari* until *dada paesi* in the form of transverse block decorated with ornaments is not only a part of roof's strength to bring stability, but also as the symbolic expression that contains meaning that human should not only pursuing the fulfillment of their desire ego. *Dada paesi* (decorated dada) is a message for the *omah's* owner to always decorate their qolb with good morality and spirituality until their presence has the power for their environment guidance. As in the *dada paesi* is hung up the hanging lamp for the building lighting.

The top of *saka* becomes *balandar-pangeret* footing supported by *umpak* or *ceblok* in the bottom, that is a foundation system that are not stick into the ground, instead stay above the ground. The meeting of foundations with the land surface is the symbolized of the meeting of *lingga* and *yoni*, which is a masculine symbol for the strength of structural the building, meets with the acceptability of feminine land surface to support, spread out, and neutralize the entire *omah* building load to the motherland.

Meanwhile, the symbolic meaning of the typology of Spatial Structure of Javanese omah (see Figure 2) which tends to be interpreted as a feminine character can be described as follows.

- 1) *Topengan (kuncungan)*, this part of the building as at the forefront and public and its existence can exist or be eliminated. It means that this part is not the actual face of its owner which commonly placed at the forefront, but the mask that functions as a camouflage of the actual face.
- 2) *Pendapa*, this part is behind the *topengan* (if present) tends to be public and functions to receive guests. This part can be analogous to the owner's actual face. It means that the occupant hospitality or character can be seen from the look of this *pendapa* room.
- 3) *Pringgitan*, this room is located between *pendapa* and *dalem ageng*. As of its name, this room is used as a place to hold *ringgit (wayang kulit/ wayang purwa)*. The existence of this room can be analogous to the woman's neck that looks appropriate and more beautiful when given jewelry.

Normally, the better and more expensive the jewelry worn, the social status will increase. Likewise, the social status of the occupants of the house, if the more frequent hold a *ringgit*, the social status will also increase in the society's point of view.

- 4) *Dalem ageng*, this room is private, closed, and sacred and located behind the *pringgitan*. The existence of this room can be analogous to the woman's body that must be covered (wrapped by clothes) because it is sacred. However, inside this sacred room, there is something more sacred that is *senthong (senthong kiwa, senthong tengah and senthong tengen)*. Therefore, in addition wearing clothes to cover their body, the woman also wears underwear because there is something more private and sacred that needs to be covered and protected.
- 5) *Senthong kiwa, senthong tengen, dan senthong tengah*. These three rooms are lined up behind the *dalem ageng*. *Senthong kiwa* and *senthong tengen* are symmetrically lined up flanking *senthong tengah*. Both rooms are used as the sleeping room. Physically, these rooms are covered and have a door. The existence this room can be analogous with women's tights that must be sturdy and closed. If it is not sturdy and tightly closed, then the existence of *senthong tengah* that is functioned to store superior agriculture's seeds and only covered with a white curtain will be severely threatened. *Senthong tengah* can be analogous to the women's womb which is only protected by a virginity membrane. Therefore, symbolically the conveyed messages is that a woman will be able to maintain and give birth to superior seed if the "*senthong kiwa and tengen*" sturdy and protected so that "*senthong tengah*" is not easily torn and the stored seeds can be maintained and taken by "wild birds" which in time can be "sown, cared for, and given the best result"

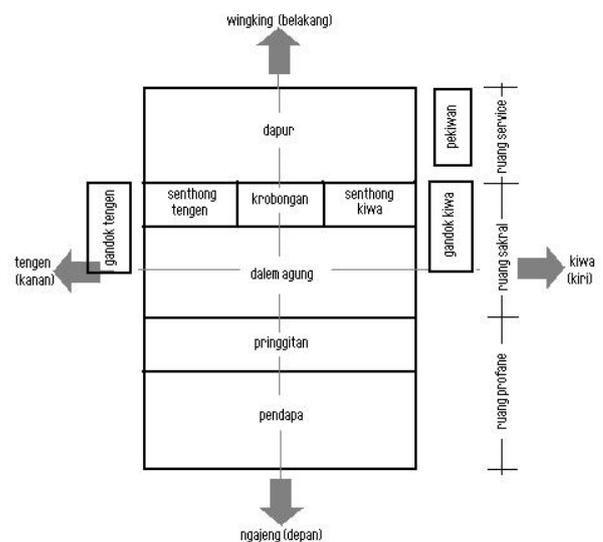


Figure 2. The typology sketch of Javanese house core structure [18].

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above elaborations, it can be drawn that there are two conclusions, as follows.

Firstly, Javanese human consciousness that put local wisdom as the important part to build the identity of Javanese architecture makes Javanese architecture develop according to its own metaphysics and has clear philosophical differences with other architectures. The Javanese in their consciousness understand beauty as the ideal value as a sensory sense that can be interpreted as sensitivity to the physical environment. The expression of Javanese architecture shows Javanese human understanding of duality, namely the existence of two dichotomous elements, two opposing elements that must always be harmonized, such as gender elements into a system of symbols of duality, *linga*, and *yoni*, which are masculine and feminine.

Secondly, the symbol of local wisdom that is attached to *omah* buildings as one the Javanese architecture products is something that has functional values and alive, even as the expression of Javanese cultural beauty which embodies the philosophical message of Javanese life view. *Omah's* expression, which is a product of Javanese architecture, is not only a physical architectural problem but also a debate over knowledge and efforts to fulfill the desires and passions of human tastes. Acceptance of society and the environment for the presence of an *omah* is nothing but power over the knowledge and will of the owner.

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