

# Javanese Architecture is Not A Traditional Architecture

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**Abstract:** The aims of this study is intended to understand the discourse of Javanese Architecture as a product of Javanese culture to fulfill basic human needs in form of a living space material. Javanese architecture is constantly oriented to preserve the harmony between nature and space along with society from the modernity pressure in which science and social practice is a network of knowledge practice and power. What types of concept that underlies the embodiment of architecture, as happened in Javanese Architecture, which is actually the owner discourse that discussed using qualitative methods and descriptive qualitative and interpretative techniques and using a hermeneutic approach. Architecture is not merely meant as an inanimate object, but it is considered as a mean of visual communication whose meaning will never stop. Therefore, space is considered as something that represents an event or a bound of human collective memories. There are two results of this study. First, positioning morality as an essential meaning of Javanese architecture in the present context as a form of Javanese people awareness in building their living space material. Secondly, the local wisdom contained in Javanese architecture as human living space material is the expression of the Javanese mother tongue in architecture.

**Keywords:** *discourse, Javanese architecture, traditional*

## Introduction

Javanese architecture is an ancient cultural product because of its existence is closely related with past time. Unlike with the modern architecture with its novelty and often interpreted as architecture that is in line with human taste who always want everything completely new. This taste is in line with the human nature that always moves to the future. Therefore, in the design art, modern architecture seems to have succeeded in building a new awareness and dominating the awareness of traditional Javanese architecture. Consequently, almost all Javanese architecture activities are oriented to the Western, where modern culture is originated. This means that the dominance of the awareness of modern architecture that developed deeply in Javanese minds made Javanese architecture have difficulty in managing its survival (existence).

Simply to say, architecture is often interpreted as a living space material that expresses human consciousness, will, and power. Javanese architecture is a product of Javanese culture in terms of fulfilling human life's needs in form of house which further considered as Javanese living space material. As an effort to fulfill those needs, in the part of human consciousness, will and power are the reflection of human desire. Human with its desire have evolved architecture into a design science which are not limited by space and *gatra* (something that seem to materialize) or lines and areas (Pitana, 2012:4). However, architecture has been evolved to explore the human consciousness area further into the niches of the beauty which are positioned to be ideal values, as Javanese architecture produced and evolved.

As a living space material, in simply, space in architecture is often interpreted as a place for an activity to take place. In the other words, the human activities will never be separated from the existence of space as a place of activity. However, how far human will realize the existence and interpret this space in their lives in order for all activities or decisions are considered appropriate? The accuracy of Javanese human's action is often expressed in terminology of *bener iku kudu pener, lire jumbuh klawan empan papan* (right is right, it means that it should be

in correspondence with space and time). This idiom implies that truth, for Javanese people, is something fragmented, which is cut into pieces in accordance with space and time. As to why humans must remain in harmony with their space to get closer to the truth. It shows that the awareness towards space becomes something very important for humans. Therefore, traditionally Javanese architecture has always been oriented to maintain the harmony between the nature and its living space material, including the society's common space from the pressure of modernity which is science and social practice is a network of knowledge and power practices.

The relation between knowledge and power is actually a discourse, which is the whole conceptual area where knowledge is constructed, formed, and produced (Lubis, 2004:148). Furthermore, when a discourse is produced, the actual discourse has been controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to the author's will because those discourse is constructed based on certain rules (*episteme*) (Foucault, 2002:143-144). Therefore, the truths have a links with the power system, as Javanese Architecture produced and evolved from time to time.

Based on the above research background, there are two research problems from this study, they are: (a) the rationality pressure of the Javanese Architecture morality in modernism; and (b) local wisdom and Javanese culture morality in maintaining the harmony between nature and human living space material.

## **Research Methodology**

This study of Javanese Architecture uses qualitative methods and descriptive qualitative with interpretive data analysis techniques and also use hermeneutic approach. Theoretically, this study selects three of six branches of hermeneutic classification from Schleimacher (Bizawie, 2002:5), namely: (a) philosophical hermeneutics, directing the study to widely and deeply interpret about the symbolic meaning of Javanese Architecture and its interaction with cultural mentality of the present's modern society, open, advance, and has a future insight to maintain the harmony between the nature and space altogether; (b) dream analysis, regarding the Javanese Architecture form as the construction of Javanese cultural symbols which at certain times are represented in their daily lives; and (c) social hermeneutics, directing the study to be a fundamental understanding of the interrelationships between the Javanese human beings and their social actions, as well as the direction of the intended cultural mentality development.

In this study, Foucault discourse theory is considered as the main theory to discuss two research problems which are supplemented with three other theories used eclectically, they are: (a) Giddens's structural theory; (b) Eco's Semiotic Visual Communication theory; and (c) Jauss's Reception theory.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### ***Rationality Pressure to the Morality of Modernism in Javanese Architecture***

Rationality is a mindset to act in accordance with the human mind and logic. The incongruity between an act with mind and logic are considered as something unreasonable. Therefore, rationality is the key of change and development toward modernism. Modernism as a 'feeling structure' which is involves hopes, changes, ambiguities, risks, and chronic revisions of knowledge. It is all reinforced by social and cultural processes of differentiation, commodification, individualization, rationalization, urbanization and bureaucratization (Barker, 2005:140). Furthermore, almost the entire government of the countries of the world entered a

period that rolled out modernization in the development framework. Consequently, it is inevitable that modernity has seized the community consensus to adjust their mindsets and actions to the current condition that make the whole social and cultural processes becomes the modernization driving force to meets the community needs and interests in order to actualize the desired ideals progress. It means that modernity not only offers the charm of the better quality of life, but also becomes the community needs and interests in the economics and political competition framework discussed with other areas of life, without exception, including architecture as a means to create living space materials for humans.

Modernists are assuming that along with the growth of science and technology, the world should be more stable and orderly (Giddens, 2001: xiv). They believed that every life problems in the world can be overcome with the advancement of science and technology. Furthermore, modernization which emphasizes on the importance of science and technology becomes the instruments of humanization process so that science and technology are believed to be a tool to improve human dignity (Lubis, 2004:51). This means that the more human are able to understand the world and their selves rationally, the more human can shape history for their life. In other words, rationality is the key to solve their life's problems.

For modernist, the advancement of science and technology are considered capable to control the world so that science and technology tend to colonize and overcome human consciousness. Rationality regards human as poor creatures; even just an object of its rationality, with no exception in their effort to meets their living space materials. Consequently, human as being who has active and creative consciousness; to fulfill these needs demand intelligent responses for every changing resulting from the continuous advancement of science and technology.

For the Javanese, the forming process of a response and strategy to overcome the changing as a result of modernization has made the socio-cultural boundaries in society more widespread and blurred, the changing of community's characters becomes more distinct, traditional ties are weakening because of the individuals autonomy are getting stronger. In addition, traditional Javanese values which are used as generic culture references must be deconstructed and bargaining against the prevailing values make every individual in a society have many choices to determine their life attitudes, including in architecture. At this point that Javanese Architecture which is commonly regarded as traditional architecture must be redefined to determine the direction of its development in the present so as not to be overrun by modernization itself. Congruous with Giddens opinions, if the development of science and technology is not accompanied by the right responses and strategies, it is not uncommon for both of them have the opposite effect (Giddens, 2001: xvi).

The changes that widely occurs in society due to modernity not only explaining how the community interacts with various factors that determine the widespread social structuring, but also resulting in universal human tragedy (Abdullah, 2006:143). Even this universal human tragedy is a serious crisis that is complex and multidimensional, lessening the established traditions, norms, laws, and orders in the astonishing level (Capra, 2004:3). This reality complexity is driven by the un-avoided globalization and markets that have been turned into dominant powers forming a new values and social orders (Abdullah, 2006:143). This structural differentiation is the most elementary process in the modernization.

In fact, the modernized societies directly have the most differentiated social structural and culture rather than the traditional societies (Lash, 2004:207). This differentiation process occurs when modernization and globalization have introduced new values in the tradition environment. Furthermore, the communities members that support those traditions will constantly experience socio-structural differentiation process and also generalization its values, norms, and meanings.

Related to architecture, that shifts has contributed toward Javanese human knowledge as a unit of Javanese culture itself. Everyone who has been interacted their knowledge systems with the new values will try to give a new meaning to the existing orders, not to mention normative things in the Javanese Architecture, as written in the rules of customs and traditions, even those that are not explicitly expressed as in morality and Javanese religiosity.

Generally, the life materialization process has transformed various things into commodities so that a widespread commodification process occurs (Lash, 2004:54). Markets have led modern society into cultural economic model that considered every cultural object as commodities, including Javanese architecture which penetrates society awareness to affirm the modernity hegemony. In this study, morality commodification shows that in the modern society an individuals or groups can easily construct their morality based on their knowledge, appetite, and interest by following the market logic. Therefore, the functions and essential meanings (morality) of architectures are no longer dominant consideration to maintain the harmony between the nature and space along with its society, but are replaced by consideration toward the exchange rate that will be obtained. The more profitable the exchange rate that will be obtained, the more likely that option will be choosed. At this point, it is deemed necessary to maintain and develop the morality which is the essential meaning of Javanese architecture in the modern context as the realization of Javanese's society awareness in building their living space materials with shared moralities.

### **Local Wisdom as the Mother Tongue of Javanese Architecture**

As conscious beings, humans know that they know something about certain things. It is proved by their ability to think and communicate. Thinking is speaking in one's own heart while communicating is talking between subjects (Pitana, 2012:4). Considering these two activities are speech acts which emphasize on the use words so that such activities are not possible without the use of language. Using a language, human can understand each others and realize their understanding among themselves. These mutual understanding and comprehension what is meant by awareness and in which language becomes a tool and form of its consciousness. Javanese architecture has its own language and manifestation of Javanese society's awareness in creating its living space material.

This visual manifestation is an entity that has meanings (Mohith, et.al., 2016:84). Understanding the architecture expression as a language is the same as to make architecture into a cultural text that should be read to reveal its meanings. It means that every element in architecture can be analogous as a "word" that can be assembled to express its meaning. Thus, language has its own function as communication tools which then can be referred as the form of collective society's awareness. For example in Javanese, there is a phrase *tembung momot dunung* which means that every word has its roots and compatibility with the context (space and time).

The above statements at least show that every element in Javanese Architecture is not something without foundation and reason, but it is the result of *mesu budi* and *laku kasutapan*, even can be said as the result of human thought contemplation. For example, Javanese people believed that between "containers" and "contents" is necessarily need to be balanced, aligned, even cohesiveness as to create inner peace, wellness, and prosperity in life and existence (Pitana, 2012:5).

Furthermore, Javanese Architecture is commonly interpreted as the unity of three elements. First, the relation with the inventive soul (*wastu*), which is the construction of embodiment of

the soul creation which has the dimension of truth, beauty, and goodness which always maintain the harmony with the environment (nature and its society). Second, the relations with the resources (*kalang*), it is a construction oriented to beauty and blessing (the natural harmony for the life and existence continuity). Third, the relation with form (*wewangunan*), it is an expression of propriety and appropriateness of the human's life to maintain the natural harmony and their living space in the community.

In an effort to maintain the harmony of nature and living space with it, Javanese human use architecture which is not only discussing about lines and areas, even not only about trinity's rule of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio which is a synthesis between strength (durability and firmness), usefulness (convenience or utility), and beauty (beauty or *venustas*), but rather to the expression of will and power in the human consciousness areas. Javanese architecture tends to use the architecture language which present the beauty's values with full of honesty and reasonableness. It is as mentioned by Thomas Aquinas, '*pulchrum splendor est veritatis*', which means "beauty is the emanation of truth"(Mangunwijaya, 1992:9-10), which is commonly expressed in three ways, namely: (a) form and scale; (b) balance and stability; and (3) rhythm and rhyme (Jianjun, 2016:308).

The above parallelism shows that local wisdom becomes the important part to build Javanese architectural identity, even making Javanese architecture developed according its own metaphysics and having clear philosophical differences between Javanese architecture and other architectures. This means that the attached local wisdom symbol is something has functional values and alive. Therefore, the living symbol and implies for Javanese human becomes a common property which live and influences it, and it must be developed in the present context.

In the context of language as a tool and a form of human consciousness, especially in Javanese Architecture, it is parallel with Foucault's discourse word as "understanding", the understanding for Javanese people is closely related to "inner power" (*kesakten* – concentrated cosmic power, self-justification), as revealed in the word "*ngelmu*". *Ngelmu* also means as science, the meaning (especially in mystical meaning), and magical power for example, in the sense of special ability for physical self-justification. In word "understanding" there is a permanent power expansion in human itself, which is a human who has *true taste (rasa sejati)*. The word "understanding" can be understood as a liberation process from temporary attachment from the shadows and physically. Liberation is related to a process of refinements and restraining inner perception. Consequently, understanding is the development process for the subject who know about it itself. The meanings of an object who know itself will growth. So that, the pressure lies to the subject who understands, not to the understanding object which still to be known – as ethics' Socrates theory (Magnis-Suseno, 1991:200). Javanese human in their consciousness understand this kind of meaning as sense which is sensually can be interpreted as sensitivity to the physical environment (includes maintaining the harmony of nature and along with its society).

Presupposition of the Javanese Architecture realization as a language (as a means of visual communication) to build the collective awareness of its society requires language that is mastered and understood by its Javanese society which is commonly called as "mother tongue". Mother tongue is a language originates from locality and morality of the supporting societies. Thus, it can be said that if Javanese people make local wisdom as the basis for developing their living space materials (architecture) which is always oriented to truth, beauty, goodness to maintain the harmony of nature and their living space along with its society. Furthermore, local wisdom can be considered as the mother tongue of Javanese Architecture.

## Conclusions

From the above discussion of this study, there are two conclusions as follows:

- 1) Rationality pressure toward Javanese Architecture morality in modernism makes its function and essential meanings in the form of morality and spirituality in architecture are no longer a dominant consideration to maintain the harmony of nature and its community shared space. However, it is replaced by the consideration of the exchange rates that are to be obtained. Therefore, the morality and spirituality in Javanese Architecture should be always maintained and developed in the present context. Furthermore, it is necessarily needed to make Javanese Architecture no longer considered as an ancient cultural product or traditional architecture whose existence strongly related to the past time, but to be interpreted as a future architecture which capable to maintain the harmony of nature and its shared community space.
- 2) Javanese Architecture as a living space for Javanese peoples and also means as visual communication medium in building collective awareness of its society requires, a mastered and understood language by its society namely "mother tongue". Mother tongue is a language originates from morality and spirituality of the supporting society that hereinafter referred as local wisdom. Therefore, local wisdom should be used as the basis development of Javanese Architecture from time to time oriented to truth, beauty, and goodness in maintaining the harmony of nature and along with its living space society.

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