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## The Javanese Culture and Indonesian Civilian – Military Relations in the Era of Soeharto

**ABSTRACT:** This article, by using the historical method and qualitative approaches, tries to comprehend the political culture of Indonesia and it is complicated indeed caused of the comprehensiveness of understanding the political culture of variety of ethnics in Indonesia. Pertaining to qualitative approaches, it refers to a variety of different data collection methods that include field research and field observations to the center of the Javanese culture. The findings show that Indonesia has some of the dominant cultures which coloring the political culture, one of them is Javanese culture. To understand the culture of Java, we could simply observe through the division of social classes conducted by Clifford Geertz (2014), namely: “Santri” (Indonesian Muslim), “Abangan” (Ordinary People), and “Priyai” (Javanese Noblemen). In the early of the independence era (1945), the political color of social stratification was most obvious, especially in politics and the military in Indonesia. The Javanese culture in the President Soeharto’s era (1966-1998) was very influenced to the political behavior of civilian and military leaders. President Soeharto was positioned as the main character as the story of the king of Java, where the palace servants and soldiers are all subject to and respect, and no one can deny. Soeharto managed to build a single army loyalty to the President. When compared with the President Soekarno’s era (1945-1966), despite a less harmonious relationship with TNI (Indonesian Military) officers, President Soekarno was still appreciated as a father for the Indonesian military officers.

**KEY WORDS:** Javanese Culture; Civil-Military Relations; President Soekarno and Soeharto of Indonesia; Military Politics.

### INTRODUCTION

In comprehending the relationship between civilians and the military in Indonesia, we should firstly understand the history of political culture of Indonesia itself. As a country which has 600 ethnic groups was a major cause of trouble to describe the political culture in Indonesia specifically (Koentjaraningrat ed., 1990; Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta, 2003; and Goebel, 2013).

Therefore, the writer aimed to explain the political culture of Java, which is a majority interest in the formation of political behavior and attitudes in Indonesia. The Javanese culture was more influential factor of politic in Indonesia, because of some reasons.

Firstly, in terms of the composition of the population, the Javanese culture is the majority of ethnic group in the various regions in Indonesia. Based on the population

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census conducted by the Dutch colonial government in 1930, the Javanese population were approximately 47%; Sundanese were 14.5%; the ethnic of Makassar/Bugis in South Sulawesi were 3.68%; Batak were 2.04% in North Sumatra; Bali amount to 1.88%; Acehnese were 1.4%; 1.6% of Malays ethnic; Madurese were 7.3%; and the Chinese ethnic as much as 2.8% (cited in Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta, 2003).

Secondly, in the geographic breadth of the island of Java, only 7% of the total area of Indonesia's territory were inhabited approximately 65% of Indonesia's population (Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta, 2003; and Tumonggor *et al.*, 2013). Thirdly, the presence of the capital of Indonesia were located on the island of Java, causing the Javanese have wider opportunities to be in the center power. The Indonesian government system based on Java, while the others areas outside of Java does not develop economically, politically, socially, and culturally (Thornton, 1972; Marijan, 1999; and Ariyanto, Darmawan & Nugroho, 2015).

The Javanese community can be divided into three subcultures, namely: *Santri*, *Abangan*, and *Priyai* group (Schulte, 2008:76; Geertz, 2014; and al-Farizi, 2017). The *Santri* is a society which is based on Islamic culture. They generally get religious education from schools of traditional Islamic education or *pesantren* (Soemardjan, 1981:10; Dhofier, 2011; and Sulistiono, 2011). At the time of Dutch colonialism, the *Santri* communities generally did not want to cooperate with the Dutch government. They also did not want to join the school founded by the Dutch government, which influenced by the Christianity educational system (Steenbrink, 1984 and 1995; Hidayat ed., 2006; and Vlekke, 2017:xix).

The *Santri* community is who live in villages and cities; and they generally work as farmers and traders. The merchant of *Santri* community is who appeared in many urban areas in Java, and most of them have trade relations with some traders from Arabic, Indian, and Malay. When the Dutch came to command in Indonesia, many Muslim traders went bankrupt, because of competition from Chinese traders who had the support from

the Dutch government (Korver, 1985; Noer, 1996; and Mawarni, 2017:159-160).

The *Abangan* communities are mostly came from the village. They are poorly educated consisting of farmers and laborers. Their religious doctrine is syncretism, which is a combination of the teachings of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Javanese's beliefs (Lombard, 1996; Geertz, 2014; and Burhani, 2017). In the colonial era, some of the *Abangan* group did in cooperation with the Dutch government, as a laborer, became the Dutch Army, but some of them also stand against the Dutch government. As a political ideology, some of the *Abangan* communities are becoming members of the organization of Communist, Nationalist, and Socialist. In the Reform era (1998 to date), the *Abangan* groups have an important role in social and political change in Indonesia (Ufen, 2008; and Burhani, 2017).

The *Priyai* communities are groups of people who are descendants of Javanese kings or the nobles of Java, whom devout to hold the values of Javanese culture, although they had been a Muslim. Some of the *Priyai* groups also cultured as the *Santri* groups did, such as Sultan Agung and Prince of Diponegoro in Central Java (Riyadi, 1999; Carey, 2008; and Burhani, 2017). In the Dutch colonial era, the aristocracy manipulated by the colonial power to be given positions in the civil administration, such as Regent; while the position of governor occupied by the Dutch. The *Priyai* who served as regent governments of Dutch are often repression against civilians, who do not want to follow the orders of the Dutch government (Sutherland, 1983; Ufen, 2008; and Burhani, 2017).

The Ethical Politics, or the political system, in the time of Dutch colonial government was known as reciprocation politic implemented by the Dutch government in 1901. The Ethical Politics has spawned a new group of younger aristocracy and Western educated, but have a high national consciousness (Gouda, 2007; and Kahin, 2013:17). This new aristocracy groups hate the attitude of their parents (traditional *priyai*), who perform the oppression of the natives. The new aristocracies hate the attitude of the Dutch

government to use the traditional aristocracy to oppress the natives. The *Priyayi* group, then, formed a group of organizations to fight for and set free of Indonesia's independence (Kartodirdjo *et al.*, 1987; Frederick, 1989; and Ham, 2002).

## METHOD

This research using the historical methods and qualitative approaches (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Esterberg, 2001; Sjamsuddin, 2007; and Yusuf, 2014:338). Pertaining to qualitative approaches, it refers to a variety of different data collection methods that include field research and field observations to the center of the Javanese culture, namely Yogyakarta and Solo. The author also conducted a study at UGM (Gadjah Mada University) and UI (University of Indonesia) library in Yogyakarta and Depok, West Java, to obtain reading materials that strengthen the research data (Zed, 2004; and Sjamsuddin, 2007).

The author also conducted interviews with Respondent A, namely Salim Said, as the military observer in Jakarta; and with Respondent B, Laksamana Sudomo, as former military officers in Jakarta, who have close relations with the former President Soeharto. The interview had been conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, on July 2010, eight years last ago. The objective of interviews is to ensure and recheck that the data related to historical events about the Indonesian military were correct (Sjamsuddin, 2007; and Habiansyah, 2008).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

***The Javanese Culture in the Age of Independence.*** At the beginning of the independence era in August 1945, many of *Priyayi* (Javanese noblemen) communities, who live in economic trouble, that is because they are not used to working hard as the *Santri* (Indonesian Moslem) and *Abangan* (Ordinary People) communities did. The *Priyayi* groups are accustomed given financial assistance and a high position in the edge of the civilian government of the Netherlands (Sutherland, 1983; Kartodirdjo *et al.*, 1987; Frederick, 1989; Kahin, 2013; and Geertz, 2014).

The term of *Priyayi* was expanded meaning after the independence of Indonesia. The

term of *Priyayi* not only refers to the group of descendants of Javanese king only, but also used to name the group who hold positions in the civil administration, although he/she is not a descendant of Javanese kings. This suggests that the terms of *Santri*, *Abangan*, and *Priyayi* are not absolute, but always changes (Geertz, 2014; al-Farizi, 2017; and Burhani, 2017).

After the independence of Indonesia (1945) and up to now, the cultural and ideological conflict between members of political parties and religious groups of *Abangan* often occurred. The political parties of *Santri* groups are always trying to fight for the principles of Islam as the state ideology. While the members of the political party of *Abangan* group wants the principle of secular as state ideology (Ham, 2002; Geertz, 2014; al-Farizi, 2017; and Burhani, 2017).

So now, it still feels the difference between the *Priyayi* and the common people in social communication. Ordinary people using the Javanese language subtle (*kromo inggil*) in communicating with *Priyayi*; while the *Priyayi* use regular Javanese language (*kromo middle*) in communicating with civil society. Javanese language consists of three levels, namely: *kromo inggil* or soft Javanese; *kromo middle* or regular Java language; and *ngoko* or rough Javaese language (Anderson, 1990; Kridalaksana, 2001; and Hartati, 2008).

Currently, the stratification of groups based on the *Santri*, *Abangan*, and *Priyayi* – although it is still existence – have experienced social and political change. The *Santri* group has a lot of highly educated and scholars. Many of those who occupy positions in the civil government, private, military (as Commander as well as Officer), and become a scientist (with Ph.D. academic title). Despite of this, not many of them were successful in the business (Kartodirdjo *et al.*, 1987; Ham, 2002; Geertz, 2014; al-Farizi, 2017; and Burhani, 2017).

The *Abangan* group has many scholars and began studying both Islam and Christian religion. They have left the job as a farmer and get the new work, as laborer in the company, became the army, police, government officials, and politicians. The

*Priyayis*, who are descendants of Javanese nobility, no longer serve as the civilian government, except the Sultan of Yogyakarta (Soemardjan, 1981; Kartodirdjo *et al.*, 1987; and Burhani, 2017).

The distribution of Javanese traditional society is also based on the level in the Hinduism religion which has five castes, namely: (1) caste of *Brahma*, or pastors and teachers; (2) caste of *Ksatria*, or kings and warriors; (3) caste of *Waisya*, or merchants; (4) caste of *Sudra*, or farmers and artisans; and (5) caste of *Pariah*, the beggars. Those caste divisions in traditional Javanese society still exist in social, economic, political, and military (Howe, 2001; Miharja, 2013; Nastiti, 2014; and Purana, 2016).

The *Abangan* society from the village in the island of Java is very interested to become soldiers or knight. Although it gave a very little salary earned, but the most important is the change in social status obtained after becoming soldiers. They will be honored by the people, even going to get political power. The profession as army officers is the ideals of Indonesia youth, especially from the middle and lower-class of societies (Anderson, 1988; Jenkins, 2010; and Raditya, 2018).

***The Javanese Culture and Civilian-Military Relations in Indonesia.*** The division of the army groups based on the *Santri* (Indonesian Moslem) and *Abangan* (Ordinary People) groups is often become a warm issue that has always dealt with by scientists and political observers in Indonesia. Some scientists is labeling the army officers of *Santri* group as “green army” or Islamic nationalist; and *Abangan* army as a group of “red and white army” or secular nationalist (Bhakti *et al.*, 1999; Khairan, 2004; Jenkins, 2010; and Geertz, 2014).

The military officers from Central Java mostly as *Abangan* groups, like General Soeharto. While the army officer who came from West Java region is mostly a group of *Santri* army. The army officers from East Java are mostly follows the *Santri* cultural, especially those from the Maduranese. The army officers who come from outside Java – with the exception of the Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist – are mostly from the *Santri*

groups, because Islamic culture outside of Java influenced by Malay culture (Jenkins, 2010; and Suracman, 2010:64-65).

In the reign of the Indonesian-Malay archipelago (Java Hinduism, Buddhist, and Islamic Sultanate), the profession as an army officer only intended for children and the royal family of king, while civilians just become a regular army (soldiers). A prince must has many experiences in the army before inauguration the throne by the king, for example, became warlords. In the era of Indonesian independence, the professional army officer is open to all Indonesian people regardless of social status in society. An army officer who had greater success in the career army has a chance to become the commander of the army, even though he was descended from the commoners people (Bhakti *et al.*, 1999; Khairan, 2004; Jenkins, 2010; and Amanah, 2015).

The appointment of a high-ranking military into military leaders was not based on social status and lineage. All Armed Forces Commander since the era of General Soedirman in 1945 to the age of General Endriartono Sutarto in 2006, for example, came from ordinary people’s of social background. Only the General Andi M. Jusuf (1979-1982) was the one who came from the descendants’ King of Bone in South Sulawesi (Said, 1991; Muslim, 2004; and Sutarto, 2014).

The majority of Indonesian societies’ culture was influenced by agrarian culture or agriculture that has put the profession of the Indonesian army on a respectable position. This led military profession in great demand by the youth, who came from rural areas or small towns in Indonesia, particularly from Java. While Padang and Bugis societies that majority of trader cultured were less interested in military profession. Even, if there were of them to be a member of army, they mostly choose to become an officers’ army (Koentjaraningrat ed., 1990; Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta, 2003; Said, 2006; and Jenkins, 2010).

The culture of agrarian society or agriculture was very concerned with the status symbols. By becoming a member of the army, they feel sturdy and honorable by

wearing the military uniforms and are called 'Sir' by the civil society, and no longer called 'Mas'. The trader culture prefers financial profit; the greater of the economic income, the higher of a person's status in a public environment (Anderson, 1990; Kridalaksana, 2001; and Jenkins, 2010).

Political culture that emerged in the era of President Soekarno (1959-1966) and President Soeharto (1966-1998) was the tendency to form the pattern of patronage-client relationship or paternalism. Indeed, the political culture of paternalism is rooted to the tradition of society itself. The paternalism culture started to be used in public life of the Indonesian nation (Legge, 2001; Elson, 2005; Lukiyanto, Widita & Kumalasari, 2018; and interview with Respondent A, 3/7/2010).

The main characteristic of the paternalism culture is the structure and hierarchy of power relations shaped by the interests and familial relationship. Among the different social and political position, established the relation based on loyalty, because the relationship of interest with the provision that the leader who was considered the father of providing protection and facilities and vice versa the followers are treated as children respond with support and loyalty (*cf* Dwianto, 1999; Marijan, 1999; and Lukiyanto, Widita & Kumalasari, 2018).

In the era of President Soekarno, for example, the military officers put Sukarno not only as a President, but also as a highly respected father. Although Soekarno has many different political views with other high-ranking of officers' army, but in the history of the relationship between Soekarno and the army, there wasn't a high-ranking of the officers who dared to criticize the President Soekarno directly (Crouch, 1985; Feith, 1995; Legge, 2001; and Fattah, 2005).

As the rebellion events of the G-30-S/ PKI (*Gerakan 30 September/Partai Komunis Indonesia* or the September 30 Movement/ Indonesia Communist Party) in 1965, the political conflict arises between President Soekarno and TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* or Indonesia National Military)'s officers, nevertheless the General Soeharto still used polite language and put himself like

a child in front of the parents, when dealing with President Soekarno (Crouch, 1985; Feith, 1995; Legge, 2001; Fattah, 2005; and Zuhdi, 2014:545).

This political treatment was influenced by Javanese culture that tends to avoid the conflict. The Javanese culture was closed and more considering as the aspects of one's feelings so many elements of dishonest and hypocrite. What has been talked sometimes is different from what is in the heart and mind (Dwianto, 1999; Marijan, 1999; and Lukiyanto, Widita & Kumalasari, 2018).

The communities' culture outside of Java (e.g. Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Maluku) more open and speak what they are, and courage to face conflicts openly. The culture of Indonesian tribes has long assimilated with each other, so that a man from a tribe (e.g. Padang in West Sumatera) is not necessarily behaving cultured of Padang (Koentjaraningrat ed., 1990; Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta, 2003; and Schulte, 2008). Many high-ranking members of the military or political member from other ethnic in Indonesia, who have long-lived and hung out in Javanese culture, will become more cultured of Java (Thornton, 1972; Marijan, 1999; and Jenkins, 2010).

When President Soeharto is being powerful, the patronage-client culture was growing in Indonesia, both in the field of government, the bureaucracy and the military, and in economic. Indonesian military officers at the time of the Soeharto government will not succeed in a career if they have not a middle man (broker/middlemen), who introduces himself with a patron or shade (in this case the patron meant the President Soeharto). Middle man in the authoritarian of President Soeharto consists of the Soeharto's family, children, wife, son, and also the ministers who have a solid relation with President Soeharto, like General L.B. Moerdani and Prof. Dr. B.J. Habibie (Winters, 1996; Elson, 2005; Pour, 2007; Jenkins, 2010; Makka, 2013; and interview with Respondent B, 5/7/2010).

However, the patronage-client relationship in the era of President Soeharto has damaged the cadre system in the military

institution. The army officer who occupies important positions in the military are more determined by their good relationship with the President Soeharto and his family, and not based on the consideration of expertise and dedication of the military institutions. In military organizations has occurred the competition amongst groups of army officers to establish a closer relationship with the family of President Soeharto. This causes the command structure in the army cannot be function properly, due to the frequent conflicts of interest between groups of army officers (Elson, 2005; Jenkins, 2010; and and interview with Respondent A, 3/7/2010).

When occurrence of the riots on May 12 to 14, 1998, for example, Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto, who occupied as military high commander of KOSTRAD (*Komando Strategis Angkatan Darat* or Army Strategic Command) disobeyed the command of General Wiranto who was occupied the position of ABRI commander. This is due to Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto feel that he has a family relationship with President Soeharto. The group of army officers who endorsed the Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto more submissive and obedient to him than to General Wiranto, because they earn top positions in the army through Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto's effort (Elson, 2005; Soempeno, 2009; and Crouch, 2010).

After Soeharto resigned from the President, Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto was discontinued from his position by General Wiranto, for alleged of the human rights violations by killing several of student activists. The results of trials of high military officers decided Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto convicted and dismissed as a member of the armed forces without trial. This case shows the existence of competition between groups of army officers in the military and political family in Indonesia (Elson, 2005; Soempeno, 2009; Crouch, 2010; and Amanah, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

The Javanese was the majority of ethnic in Indonesia led to a very dominant Javanese

culture in coloring the political culture in Indonesia. Islam in Java was very unique, because of the influence of viscous customs, which was a Buddhist-Hinduism heritage. To see the political culture of Indonesia, then, we must understand the culture of Java.

The relationship between the civil and the military in Indonesia was very influenced by Javanese culture; one reason is majority of elite civilian and military in Indonesia came from Javanese ethnicity. The President Soekarno (1945-1966) – although he influenced by the culture of Western education – still grasp to the Javanese culture.

The President Soeharto (1966-1998) was very thick and liked to use the symbols of Javanese culture. He established himself as a King of Java which must be respected, honored, and can not be criticized. Until the end of his power in May 1998, he never had been criticized openly and directly by active military officers.

Although Indonesia's political culture steeped in Javanese culture, it did not mean that the one who occupy the political office in Indonesia should striped highborn of Java. The development of education after the independence of Indonesia has changed the coating elite class in Indonesia, children of farmers, by having a good education, could be a leader of Indonesia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>**The Statement:** I hereby certify that this article is the true result of my research, so it is not a product of plagiarism, and it has not also been published in other journals yet. Thus, my statement, which I can accounted before the law, is absolutely correct.

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