

Illustration on Javanese Manuscripts: The Intellectuality and the Capability of Thinking into Indonesian Art and Writing Culture

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ABSTRACT: *The tradition of writing and drawing in illustration was found in the old manuscript. Some parts of those old manuscripts show unique illustrations as well as the local identity of Nusantara's society. The manuscript reflects the society culture of thinking and aesthetic achievement of visual art. The illustrations of old Javanese manuscripts were well documented and has various representation in visualization art and style, drawing method, theme, and visual objects, even though the visualization of the visual concepts is practically similar to another. It reflects the structured illustration and style as well as expression symbol of the Javanese society in that era. Illustration of the old Javanese manuscript in the colonial era has changed and developed its visual state as the interaction between the Animism in the Pre-Hinduism era, cultural paradigm of Hinduism-Buddhism, Islamic and Colonialism.*

KEY WORDS: *writing tradition, illustration tradition, colonialism, and old Javanese manuscript.*

INTRODUCTION

Manuscripts are artefacts recording culture achievement and thinking enrichment of a nation and are the sources of culture knowledge of the past. Every people in the world has old valuable manuscripts – which are important records on the existence of a nation – and so do the Indonesians. Indonesian ancestors recorded their culture of the past on various kinds of manuscripts, spread in the whole country of Indonesia. The number and diversity of the manuscripts show that Indonesians are the people having the intellectuality and the capability of expressing ideas, thoughts, and

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culture of thinking into writing. The society culture of expressing ideas and thinking is wrapped in various kinds of manuscripts – some of which are expressed in ornaments, illuminations, and illustrations (Florida, 1995). These drawings show unique and typical visualization adjusted to the background of the society and the their functions.

The writing culture of the Javanese has been consensus for ages. This can be proven from the fact that manuscript artefacts can still be traced from the periods of the beginning of such Javanese kingdoms as Majapahit, Pajang, Demak, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. Some manuscripts reflect illustrations, and are well documented in both Indonesian and overseas libraries (Yudosaputro, 1998b). Modernization, however, has made these valuable manuscripts uncomprehensible for the young generation today.

To trace the creation of Javanese manuscripts, we cannot put their correlation to the visual art of leather puppets aside, because we can draw an analogy between the stories of the shadow plays and those of important events of the kingdoms and their kings. The development of Javanese culture, therefore, can be considered to be parallel to the puppet stories (Moebirman, 1960). Comprehending the plot of the stories and their characters is an attempt to understand the characters and life philosophy of the Javanese. Javanese manuscripts which can still be appreciated are those of the 18th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. They reflect the stories of periods of the Majapahit kingdom which then change and develop because of the adaptation of Islamic norms. Accordingly, in tracing the creation of the manuscripts of those eras, we cannot ignore either the role of Islam religion or the political factors of the Javanese supremacy. According to John Pemberton in his book, *On the Subject of Java* (1994), most manuscripts written at these periods are about the effects of Dutch colonialism towards Javanese culture, especially those of Javanese kingdoms (Surakarta and Yogyakarta). Some of the manuscripts of 19th centuries reflecting illustrations likely represent cultural phenomena of those eras. They are, therefore, history records and one the artefacts is necessarily to understand and investigate.

JAVANESE MANUSCRIPTS AS CULTURE PRODUCTS AND COMPREHENDING MANUSCRIPTS AND WRITING TRADITION IN JAVA

Art is a culture product which become one of the parameters to determine the values of a society. Art should represent sense or values and have visualisation. This kind of art product is a bunch of inheritences of comprehensible art works based on the society comprehension of that era (Kempres, 1959).

Considering various kinds of functions and background of art products, the creation of Javanese old manuscripts should be considered as a phenomenon in the culture which can be investigated based on culture theories of Koentjaraningrat (1997) and on 3 other accompanying forms of cultures, divided as follows: (1) Javanese manuscripts as a record of ideas, thoughts, and content of thinking are illustration of Javanese culture schemes or **ideas**; (2) Javanese manuscripts are a representations of various kinds of **social-life activities**; and (3) Javanese manuscripts are means of life senses and values which are in the form of book artefacts reflecting high achievement of Javanese intellectuality in writing and visual art or **practices**.

In creating something human beings are generally inspired by existing factors, and so were old art practitioners in Java. Their creativity is based on "knowledge" and existing art works of the past. In this research, knowledge means "tradition" – which is a bunch of inheritances on what and how art works are created based on the society interpretation of that era. The development of Javanese visual art since pre Hinduism, Hinduism-Buddhism, Islamic, and colonialism eras is basically the development of culture and aesthetic achievement referring to the needs of the society of that era.

Javanese manuscripts are important records and generally have historical values. Most of them which have been changed and adopted, especially those of 19th centuries, are recomposition products and are in the forms of traditional songs called *macapat*. Most of them were written 150 years ago, during the end of colonialism era till the beginning of Indonesian Independence Revolution era. They are written by those who have strong correlation to Javanese kingdom society. Some of them include drawings such as illustrations which are visual art products of the Javanese (Ossenbruggen, 1975).

Writing is a highly supported activity, and the authors of that era are intellectuals who are strategically capable of recording sociopolitical genres, not only representing about future predictions but also putting them into reality. *Penulis* (Authors) in Javanese tradition are active practitioners in authority and are authorized for full freedom. The word *Penulis* in Javanese society comes from Javanese language, *panulis* or *penyerat* – i.e. those who are physically write a manuscript. An author is a composer (*panganggit*, *pangiket*) who textually and productively arranges (*nganggit*) and structures (*ngiket*) the words or texts. He is also the one who is able to interpret and then describe, colour, edit, and structure with *nedhak* – i.e. a freedom of arranging the words in rewriting (*nurun*, *nedhak*) a manuscript to become a new version with a new context (Schoemaker, 1924).

A. The Development and Role of Manuscripts in Javanese Society

The illustration of Javanese writing tradition has a strong correlation to old stuffs, so that to understand the culture of Javanese visual art should be relevant to understanding Java of the past time. For example, the oldest translation of *Ramayana* into Javanese *macapat* was written in 903 AC (After Christ), and *Mahabharata* in the era of Prabu Darmawangsa in 991 – 1007 AC (Mulyono, 1977:182-184). The manuscript of *Kakawin Arjuna Wiwaha*, in the 11th century composed by Mpu Tantular contains Javanese spiritual lessons wrapped in Hinduism puppet stories, and is an analogy of describing the struggles of the kings at that era. In the 12th century, *Mahabharata Epos* was reinterpreted according to the condition and norms of Javanese literatures. It was then localized and recomposed for shadow puppet shows containing symbols of Javanese spiritual lessons (*Serat Dewa Ruci* and *Serat Arjuna Wiwaha*) reflecting syncretism and acculturation of Javanese and Hindu cultures. This manuscript was rewritten by Mpu Sedah and has become a reference of puppet stories and their varieties until now. Hindu Classic Javanese Literary Art occurred during the era of Hindu-Buddha.

The most popular manuscripts telling about the golden era of Majapahit are *Pararathon* written by Mpu Tantular and *Negarakertagama* by Mpu Prapanca. Both describe the condition of the golden reign of Majapahit which is in accordance with Hindu and Buddha in both complexity and harmony paradigm. Concepts of king Gods and Gods of Buddha-Mahayana in the Hindu Javanese kingdom and Islamic eras give huge influences to the present politics and governance in Java. This is reflected in the manuscripts on the royal family tree which always put gods at the first level of the tree. Palaces are the centres of the spiritual power influencing the life of the society, and of the royal governance and residences (Mulder, 2005).

When Islam reached Java, Islamisation by Moslem intellectuals occurred and the quality and spirituality of religious activities increased. This can be seen in the development of transformative concepts, reflected in the old Javanese manuscripts of the 19th century. Egalitarian system of Islam succeeded in fading the differences between the hierarchies of Majapahit kingdom. Harmonious Islam sufic and mystical way of thinking acculturates with local mystism strongly derived from the tradition of Javanese. Islam education system providing *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), instead of *Padepokan* (dormitories) in the Hindu era, plays an important role in proliferating Islam religion. *Pesantren*, which is still well know until now, is also a place where the culture of reading and writing was introduced and fast developed. This brings about the development of the culture of

books and manuscripts written congruent with Islam. Rewriting the Holy Koran and Hadists leads to the development of *calligraphy* and *mushaf*. That was the time when Islamic culture and Indonesian intellectuality reached the top, when literacy of Arabic, local languages, and Malay was made possible for the society, and when illuminations and illustrations were made possible after the introduction of *daluang paper* (Ali, 1994; and Yudosaputro, 1998a).

B. Conditions of Socio-Culture on the Colonialism Era

Discrepancies on the development of art and culture occurred at the beginning of the 17th to the middle of the 18th centuries as a result of the Dutch's *divide et impera* politics. This condition brought about civil wars among Javanese kings and rebellions towards the Dutch government which occurred longer than 1 century. In addition, this period resulted in other important events leading to the change of the hierarchy of the Javanese society. For example, in 1740 the Chinese ethnic group rebelled. Javanese Succession War (1746–1757), Giyanti Agreement in 1755 stopped the war among Mataram kings, which resulted in the division of Mataram kingdom into small kingdoms: Surakarta and Yogyakarta. Blambangan kings also fought to each other, and the last war was Java War led by Pangeran Diponegoro (1825–1830), and many other events (Simbolon, 2006).

At the same time, global political crisis attacked Europe as a result of the French revolution. This crisis indirectly influenced European colonies in Asia, leading to the conflict among Europeans in Asia. It also caused the changing in political strategies of West colonialisation in Asia regions and the changing in the Dutch government in Java. In addition, another crisis happened in 1799, when VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or Dutch East India Company) was stipulated bankrupt and was eventually dispersed, and then Indonesia was taken over by the Dutch kingdom. It was at this transition period when Indonesian nationalism emerged (Lombard, 1996). At the same century, moderate Islamic culture regained its peak in Indonesia, influencing the way of thinking of the Javanese.

The transition of VOC to the government of the Dutch Royal in 1799–1800 and the global socio-political condition in Europe during the French revolution, on the responsibility of Daendels, made the French colonialize Java. In 1811–1815 on the hand of Raffles, the British had a chance to take control of Java, and he made a success in applying *liberalism*. In 1815, the British gave the control of Java to the Dutch when eventually they succeeded in driving Islamic kingdoms in the coastal areas of Java to the hinterland (Pemberton, 1994).

Moreover, human bondage which changed into Ethic Politics was conducted. This politics was identical to the Dutch force labor system (*cultuur stelsel*) subjected to the Javanese. On the other hand, the Javanese was directed to adjust their way of thinking to the Dutch way, and some of them were forced to become the Dutch army to fight other European colonizers in Asia – the French and British (Ricklefs, 2005).

The condition of royal elites and kings was engineered of that sort to become a culture pledge of Javanese kingdoms (Lombard, 1996). The intervention of foreign imperialists made the local elites and aristocrats not to have an attempt in physically fighting back on them. They made spiritual and intellectual movement instead of changes towards modernisation of thinking, and technology development caused the Javanese to have wider intellectuality. Then there emerged the movement of “modern awareness” which made the Javanese had the strong willingness to be independent society (Florida, 1995). They poured out their expectation in the art and culture products, one of which was writing manuscripts because of the support of the Dutch. Manuscripts written at this period were intended to unite the people to rebuild moral and mental crisis of the Javanese as a result of West materialistic culture and Dutch capitalist system.

The Dutch applied the culture politic strategy, and since then European colony and the intervention of the Dutch directly came into the Javanese culture. This strategy had changed the way of thinking of the Javanese who had been physically and mentally down (Florida, 1995). Kings were driven to become aristocrats because they no longer had any military and naval power. They stopped getting engaged in politics and this directly refrained the society from the communication with outside world. However, this condition had spiritually and physically changed and enlightened their thinking, and had indeed significant effects on their culture products.

The Dutch had ordered to study the old Majapahit literary art and rewrite old manuscripts had made the Javanese intellectuals effectively use the chances for spiritual movements in developing their culture. They were also encouraged to write more literary art works and resulted in the rise of Javanese literary art. The translation of foreign literary works, adoption of old literary works, and the production of new literary works by kings and their poets noted this era, commonly called as the *Renaissance of Javanese classic literary art*.

C. Illustrations on Javanese Manuscripts as the Reflection of Javanese Socio-Culture Reality

Changes on old manuscript writing make poets, in expressing social messages, agree to use modern symbols – i.e. visual languages as modern

illustrations adjusted to the changes of their thinking. Those illustrations reflect complexity state and West culture effects. Life values and spiritual-religious thinking change into profane-capitalist thinking. They still show cosmology of the Javanese oriented to palaces and kings as the centres of supreme authorities. Kings and aristocrats are still important characters of the manuscripts. Histories of Javanese kings, heroes, and puppet stories – which were not written during the pre-Islam era – are common themes for manuscripts illustrated in shadow puppet shows (Tabrani, 1990 and 1999).

Let's take *Serat Bharatayuda* as one of the illustrations. The story expresses both explicit and implicit messages about the civil war in Java. There are implicit clues as signals and social symbols for the Javanese to understand. Culture symbols are also applied in the illustrations of manuscripts. In addition, daily life of the society is one of the themes of manuscripts. This shows egalitarian condition and roles of the society significant in the colonialisation era. Importantly, this condition indicates that the cloud is over the authority of absolute kings as the centre of the universe (Fischer, 1990).



Serat Bhratayudha, 1902-1903, NN,
Collection of Sana Budaya Library of Kraton Jogya

Folklores on Panji stories remind us on Javanese cosmologies on roman stories about Javanese hero-to-prince marriages, which are in fact the symbols expressing state cosmologies, cosmic marriages between the lower and upper hierarchies. These social symbols state that palaces, i.e.

queenisation (mother earth), united with their peoples (Javanese society) as the power to gain reigns of kingdom – i.e. the independence of Javanese from Dutch colonials. Messages or social signs expressed in the stories are symbols for the unity of peoples and their kings to regain their freedom of life (Kumar & Glynn, 1996).

D. Concepts of Illustration Visuals on Javanese Manuscripts

Illustrations on Javanese manuscripts at the era of colonialisation are still traditional art-based concepts, and the techniques are traditional and society based. Techniques and concepts come from generation to generation and are intended, adjusted and refer to the traditions of the creators.

Tradition of fine art with Hindu Javanese design expresses classic art, and the forms of Islam-designing classic art are found in some regions of the Javanese-Islam kingdoms. The later is in fact developed from that of pre Hindu and Hindu eras.

Changes of puppet visualisation are adjusted to norms of Islam art – i.e. *Stillation*. These changes occurred puppets are perfectionized by fining *sunggingan* decorations, and these are puppets which are still showed until now and as references for modern puppets (Amin, 2000).

Expressing implicit/symbolic ideas is Javanese life behaviour. Symbolic ways Hindu and Islam are adjusted to local teaching – i.e. original mysticism order of the Javanese meaning that towards *manunggaling kawula lan Gusti* (the unity between humans and God). To the Javanese, understanding something implicit means understanding natural signs and symbols of the ancestors. In other words, understanding moral teaching or mysticism, symbols can keep someone to well, carefully and thoroughly understand the teaching.

The Javanese have the adage that *wong Jawa enggone semu, papaning rasa, tansah sinamuning samudra*, which means “in any activity, the Javanese often use certain social symbols, in any action use feeling, and implicitly do it” (Suseno, 2001). Those symbols represent behaviour, abstract and mysterious words and action. This affects the creation of artefacts and fine art products. Old Javanese artists, therefore, present invisible and symbolic symbols.

E. Transformation of Illustration Visualisation on Javanese Manuscripts of the 19th Centuries

Culture transformation on one space and time period correlates to the space and time of the past. The past and future participate in creating a value or meaning of human experiences, and affect the changes of culture

artefact production. The meaning of transformation on human culture products correlates to the continuous dimension of human space and time, which is the aspect of character and identity differences of the culture at every era. Culture transformation can change the way of human thinking, and can lead to meaning changes of human towards the values of culture products. Culture transformation of the Javanese continuously occurs. The strategic location of Java island makes the Javanese keep social contact and interact with various peoples. This has resulted in various adaptation to various cultures, and has made the Javanese develop their way of thinking and have evolutionarily and continuously developing culture as a result of the acculturation of various thinking paradigm (Holt, 2000).

The most dominant paradigm affecting the way of thinking of the Javanese is animism (pre-Hinduism), Hinduism-Buddhism, Islam and Western culture (colonialism). Pre-Hindu culture always is always present from generation to generation, penetrating future space and time. Illustration on Javanese manuscripts shows the relation between Javanese social life and characters. Reflection of social life is both explicitly and implicitly expressed in the content, visual language, communicative and narrative natures of the illustration, reflecting changing life and order as a result of the interference of a new culture in the Dutch colonialisation era (Geertz, 1973).

The strategy of Dutch culture is to construct an ideology by reintroducing the golden era of Majapahit as a culture reference for the Javanese royal society. Islamic manuscript writing popular at that time was shifted to *wayang* stories of the Majapahit era. Heroic stories and *wayang* varieties are still symbolically adopted to show obedience to the Dutch. Again, the Javanese artists/poets/painters show their local intellectuality through narrative and symbolic visual languages. Islam ideology is implied in *wayang* stories, people struggles in heroic stories, and king struggles in chronicle manuscripts. Political conflicts between puppet authorities and the real one are implied in *Mahabharata* and *Bharatayudha*. Social signs and symbols present in the illustration, implied and hidden in the communicative language among certain Javanese societies. Political upheaval and chaos and less effective authorities of Javanese kings because of *divide et impera* politics of the Dutch are found in the adopted manuscripts of *Serat Mahabharata* and *Bharatayudha*, symbolically expressing the fight for authorities and throne among members of royal family (Yudoputro, 1993).

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Illustration on Javanese Manuscripts



Prang Bharatayudha, Ng.Jagaradana, Pathuk, 1857,
Sana Budaya Library of Kraton Jogja Collection



Serat Asmara Supi, 1893, NN,
Jogyakarta, Sana Budaya Library of Kraton Jogja Collection

Self introspection and vertical relation between humans and God, the Creator, is expressed in the manuscripts of *Dewa Ruci*, *Bima Ruci*, *Arjuna Wiwaha*, etc (Adisasmito, 1935). Egalitarian similarity between the people

and aristocrats is implied in heroic stories reinterpreted from those of Majapahit era, such as *Serat Damar Wulan*, *Panji Jayakusuma*, *Panji Selarasa*, *Panji Asmarasupi*, etc.



Serat Damar Wulan, 1815,
Gallop's , Golden Letters, 1992 British Library Collection

Continuous cultural and sociopolitical events have significant effects on various creation of artefacts, and on concept changes of art activities, such as literary art works and manuscripts of the 19th centuries. Illustrations on old Javanese manuscripts are traditional culture products, in which their meaning and interpretation has continuously been developed. Reliefs on temples of Hinduism era, *Wayang Beber* and *Wayang Kulit* at the Islam era function as media of ritual activities, philosophy teachings and religion dispersion. In the colonialism era, illustrated manuscripts are used as ritual guidelines, communication media, and means of propaganda for dispersing concepts and politics (Tabrani, 2005).

The development of new media, techniques and concepts of visuals makes the forms and styles of illustration on Javanese manuscripts adopt and change in parallel to the functions and characters of the media. Western modern knowledge has affected the concepts of art activities. Roles of manuscripts also widen and are used as means of propaganda for concepts and politics, and as means of educating the people (Yudosaputro, 1991).

Illustrations on Javanese manuscripts are traditional fine art, art products before modern era, which are Javanese art-based conception with typical

characters. Techniques are traditional ones, which have been used for generations and which are intended, adjusted, and referred to tradition and local life values. Even though palaces no longer applies absolute authorities, illustrations on the manuscripts indicate that way of thinking of the Javanese is still oriented to the royal life and palaces as the centres of authorities. Royal family are still important characters for themes. Folklores and daily life of the society are usually present (van der Hoop, 1949).

Cultural factors and political changes have shifted the values and roles of the manuscripts. *Mpu* (practicionists), artists, poets, painters, and writers change their way of thinking and bear new “social awareness”, which is found in the process of manuscript writing and is used to meet the needs at that time. Furthermore, cultural effects of Islam intellectuals which have developed for two centuries have made the Javanese in general have the ability to read and write. This has been a trigger of the birth of poets and itelectuals from ordinary peoples, who are good enough to understand socio-culture problems of that time. Old Javanese manuscripts of the 19th centuries are important because they provide illustrations interpreting cultural phenomena at that time and written by intellectuals who understand social signs and symbols of the Javanese. They are representative and indiginous visual forms and texts (Ciptoprawiro, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The illustrations on Javanese manuscripts of the 19th centuries are adjusted to space and time and way of thinking of the society at the colonialism era. Such illustration visuals are reflected in the achievement of fine art aesthetics and way of thinking of the Javanese. Expression of messages in the concept still indicates the continuation of the past, which is in accordance with the Javanese behaviour – symbolic, explicit and implicit. Another visualisation is meditative in presenting important characters.

Globalization and changes of socio-culture-politics in Europe because of the people enforcement, limitation of absolute authorities of kings and imperium system to democracy indirectly influences the colonialisaton of the Dutch in Indonesia. These changes have brought about modern awareness and the rise of nation spirits and “Javais”, Javanese through the extraction of tradition fine art (genious local).

In addition, directions by the Dutch to return to romanticism of Majapahit classical culture and to condition Javanese royal elites and kings as royal culture pledges by the Dutch. This has resulted in art visual concepts of Hinduism classic era as references for art activities. Adjustment to Islamic norms with human egalitarian concept has reduced a culture concept of king gods and has shifted to parallel hierarchy of the king and his people.

Such condition, indeed, caused Javanese intellectuals and artists to be socially aware of the social functions of art. They remained to perform art activities as their cultural strategies. They took chances directly in contrast to the Dutch policies – i.e. the order of rewriting old manuscripts referring to those of Majapahit era. This was an attempt of the Dutch in keeping the royal away Islamic community. Varieties of wayang and heroic stories at the era of Majapahit are raised as an obedience to the Dutch. Those stories are actually a camouflage, and the essence remains the same – i.e. philosophy teaching of the ancestor life with Islamic paradigm, providing cultural symbols symbolically represented both explicit and implicit messages. This movement involve the royal and intellectuals/leaders to influence and educate the people, so that they can take part in regaining their rights of life as an independent nation.

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The number and diversity of the manuscripts show that Indonesians are the people having the intellectuality and the capability of expressing ideas, thoughts, and culture of thinking into writing.