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The Evolution of Javanese Kingship

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Abstrak


Kata kunci: kedudukan raja, keabsahan, manusia gagah-berani, dan sakti
INTRODUCTION

In order to legitimize their rule as kings or leaders over their realms, those kings have to rely on the basis of legitimacy believed by their subordinates or followers as a way that explains the legitimacies of their kingships (Weber 1978:294). Without legitimacy, one does not have authority to rule over a populace except one has to exercise repressive actions to rule other people. But one realizes that making use of force in subordinating people is ineffective to maintain or perpetuate one’s rule. Thus the phenomenon of kingship is closely related with the idea of legitimacy since it lays authority for kings or rulers to rule over their realms.

The history of Javanese kingdoms reveals how their kings continuously searched for ideas or practices that laid or supported their legitimacies to rule over their domains. It is interesting to note that the Javanese kings ruled on the basis of their legitimacies—religious values and rituals. Indeed, the Javanese rulers responded to the coming of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam by adopting those religious values for legitimizing their rule over their realms. But they retain the indigenous or local religious values and practices for legitimizing their kingships. This paper tries to reveal briefly the evolution of Javanese kingships from fifth through seventeenth centuries by examining analytically the history of Javanese kingdoms during that time. This paper falls into three parts as follows: first, describing early Javanese kingdoms that began in the fifth century when Purnavarman of Taruma in West Java erected his realm. Then turning to Central Java where two great dynasties, Sanjaya and Sailendra, declared themselves as rulers and built monumental temples in their regions. Second, depicting Javanese kingdoms moved from Central Java to East Java in the tenth century and ended when Majapahit collapsed in the fifteenth century. Third, discussing the coming and penetration of Islam into Java since it had great impact on the emergence of the Islamic Javanese kingdoms such as Demak, Pajang, and New Mataram.

EARLY JAVANESE KINGDOMS

Java’s earliest inscriptions found in the hinterland of Jakarta revealing that King Purnavarman who ruled the Tarum river basin
reinforced his legitimacy by adopting Indian religious tradition in order to elevate his magical status above other fellow chiefs (Hall 1985: 107). Purnavarman’s glorious power was carved in symbolic integration of Indic and Javanese traditions---*Vishnu’s three footprints* which were corresponded to Javanese conception of feet as the locus of power and a belief in Purnavarman as an incarnation of Visnu (Schrieke 1957:9). Furthermore, Schrieke writes that the presence of Vishnu in a ruler provided him his authority, his coronation by the gods, his sovereignty; “The ruler is in truth an aspect of Vishnu on earth” (Schrieke 1957: 91). He was known as a great warrior who succeeded to consolidate his power by destroying hostile rulers but constructing alliance networks with other chiefs who subordinated themselves as devoted subjects. As revealed by somewhat menacing language within one of the royal footprints: “These feet of the Illustrious Protector who is devoted to his duty, the incomparable prince, His Majesty Purnavarman, who formerly ruled over Taruma, may trample upon the cities of his enemies and bring help to his faithful allies” (Vlekke 1965:22).

He initiated to construct a long canal to settle the drainage problems of the coastal area by altering the course of Tarum river. This construction was aimed to increase rice production since dry-rice cultivation was practiced instead of wet-rice cultivation within his domain. Thus the divine status of Purnavarman was not only displayed by his capability to defeat hostile or rival chiefs but also by increasing rice production as a sign that he was the source of fertility within his domain. In terms of Hinduism, such magnificent power is solely possessed by gods not by human beings. Accordingly, the divine status of Purnavarman was emanated from a belief that he was an incarnation of Vishnu.

To understand how a king like Purnavarman emerged from rivalry among chiefs, Wolters introduces a concept called *men of prowess* which explains the phenomena of leadership in Southeast Asia before the adoption of Hindu-Buddhism (Wolters 1999: 18-23). According to Wolter, a person’s spiritual identity and capacity of leadership were established when his fellows recognized him to have *soul stuff* or *semangat* or *sakti* (see Boon 1977:240) since this superior endowment was only embedded within a distinctive person. Indeed, it was believed that only a person who had semangat could lead
other people to accomplish their religious, political, and economic interests.

Initially, the man of prowess emerged from a village that consists of several hamlets after the villagers recognized his superior spiritual power. In the Phillipines and Malay peninsula this man of prowess was called datu, but in Java a man of prowess was called rama who was a leader of a village which was called a wanua (O’Connor 1983:15-16). If datus or ramas in neighboring areas would also recognize the higher spiritual status of a man of outstanding prowess and seek to regularize their relations with him by means of alliances that acknowledge the inequality of the parties, this man of prowess ascended the status of rakrayan and the areas held by the rakrayan was called a watek in Javanese term. According to Hall, a watek served as a supravillage unit that managed water from a river which was needed by Javanese villagers to develop wet-rice agriculture around the river (Hall 1985:114). Indeed, the accomplishment of a successful rakrayan depended on his ability to generate prosperity for his subordinate wanuas in order to gain their cooperation and loyalties. This also applied for the datus and ramas who brought benefits for their followers. After they passed away, the successful men of prowess could be reckoned among their settlements’ ancestors and be worshipped since they were believed to preserve the social equilibrium within their communities from the unseen world. Otherwise, calamities such as diseases, bad harvest, flood, and even political chaos would strike the communities. Thus, ancestor cult laid a communication between ancestors and their communities.

On the other hand, ancestor status had elevated the men of prowess to be divine figures. Indeed, this status had attracted men of prowess to erect their tombs as sacred places while they were still alive. Some rakrayans who had anticipated their future as ancestors claimed themselves as raja or ratu by adopting religious elements of Hinduism or Buddhism. In the case of Purnavarman, he claimed himself as a king who patronized Hinduism within his realm. Heidhues concludes that the adoption of Hinduism and Budhism by Southeast Asian rulers was a way to acquire power and legitimacy (Heidhuise 2000:23).

The emergence of early Hindu rulers in Central Java was initiated by Rakrayan Sanjaya of the Mataram Region who held the title of ratu as indicated by a 732 inscription (Hall 1985:115). Sanjaya
claimed himself as a representative of the ancestors of Yavadvipa, as well as the patron of the sacred field of Siva in the Dieng Plateau complex. The temple complex on the Dieng Plateau was originally a center for the worship of indigenous deities before it also became the place of a Saivite cult by the eighth century (Vlekke 1965:30). Thus, Sanjaya relied his legitimacy on the sacred temple complex on the Dieng Plateau by blending together indigenous or ancestor cults with Hindu-Sivaite values. He erected a linga that he associated with a mountain where Hindu gods resided. Further, the 732 inscription praised Sanjaya’s successful to subdue neighboring rulers, his knowledge on Indian legal text, and his capability to create peace and prosperity within his realm—the old Mataram.

It is crucial to note that the construction of most temples in Central Java was conducted by subordinate rakrayans rather than by those claiming maharaja status (Hall 1985:126). This phenomena was indicated by the minor temples surrounding the mayor or central temples such as Sewu, Plaosan, and Loro Jonggrang bearing the names of a number of different rakrayans. Apparently, these were built in acknowledgement of their subservient roles to their overlord (Christie 1983:24). But their contributions served as a sign of bhakti to their king after they received anugraha such as honored titles or material gifts from their raja. Other minor temples scattered within the overlord’s region used to be erected by villagers who received sima grants from their rakrayans or gifts from their ruler. Their labors for erecting the minor temples had not been heavy burden for them since royal bondsmen and professional artisan groups provided continuous labors for the construction. Furthermore, temple construction could have been of a seasonal nature, corresponding to the slacks of the growing cycle, as work schedules were arranged so that they would not diminish local agricultural productivity (Hall 1985:127). Those minor temples served as local representatives of the king’s central temples—for instance the rakrayan of Sirikan’s temple looked to the royal temple complex on the Dieng Plateau as the source of its sanctity. In other word, the minor temples served to represent the political power of a king and divine power of religious gods within the king’s domain.

By the mid of eighth century, the Sailendras came to power by adopting the Indic title of maharaja in order to distinguish themselves from other regional chiefs and established their base in Central Java.
The early Sailendras were *rakrayan*, rulers of water who integrated village clusters (wanua) participating in a regional irrigation system (Hall 1985:131). As rakrayan, Sailendra succeeded to administer the management of water distribution required by villagers who grew wet-rice for their livelihood. As patrons of Buddhism, the Sailendras also erected some temples, the best known of which is *Borobudur* on the Kedu Plain. Furthermore, Vlekke argued that the Sailendras of Java must have been so rich and powerful that they could build monuments of the size and perfection of the Borobudur (Vlekke 1965:33).

Besides erecting for religious rituals, the encouragement of temple construction were also intended to maintain and enhance Sailendra’s prestige and reinforce the aura of divine majesty. Indeed, Borobudur was not only built for glorifying Buddhism but also for worshiping the deified ancestors of the Sailendra dynasty (Hall 1985:126). The construction of Borobudur sanctified the divine aspect of Sailendra rule since it is believed that the great monument was associated with the cosmic mountain of gods that eventually brought prosperity to his realm.

Sailendra’s patronage of Buddhism led Central Java to become an internationally recognized pilgrimage center and an acclaimed center for Buddhist scholarship. The visits of Chinese and Indian pilgrims promoted the Sailendra maharajas’ special patronage of Buddhism and their claims to subsequent magical prowess (Hall 1985:132). This patronage of Buddhism also led Sailendra dynasty to built good relationship with other patron of Buddhism, the maritime state of Shrivijaya, since the latter was the center of Budhism studies in Southeast Asia. This made possible a peaceful intellectual and cultural exchange between two kingdoms. As a consequence, the cultural dialogue engendered Buddhist art distributed among the sites of Srivijaya’ domain in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, as well as in Central Java. But these two kingdoms had different emphasis in maintaining their dynasties.

According to Hall, while Srivijaya’s supremacy was in the international commercial arena, the Sailendras were chiefly concerned with the construction of temples and the establishment of temple networks that enhanced their ritual sovereignty. Sailendra’s royal ambition in Java thus dictated a preference for symbolic rather than material ends. Succintly, Hall concluded that the Sailendras
demonstrated the effectiveness of patronage to temples as the source of legitimacy and symbolic capital (Hall 1985:135).

When the Sanjayas returned to come to power in the first half of ninth century, they did not destroy or change Buddhist temples built by the Sailendras. According to Heidhues, the Hindu Sanjayas’ descendant—Rakai Pikatan, who married a Buddhist Sailendras’ princess sponsored monuments to both religions, including the Hindu Prambanan complex completed in 856 (Heidhues 2000:49). Lara Jonggrang, the largest temple in this complex is dedicated to three prominent Hindu’s gods, Siva, Vishnu, and Brahma. It seems to be that Sanjayas’ descendant tried to reinforce his legitimacy by adopting three prominent Hindu’s gods instead of one god, Siva, patronized by previous Sanjayas’ rulers in Dieng Plateau complex in the first half of eight century. Though he erected Hindu’s temples and his wife patronized Buddhist temples, it does not mean that ancestor cult disappeared from Central Java’s religious activities. The state donated portions of their revenues to smaller temples with clear ancestor-worship connections (Christie 1983:25). Thus the Sanjaya’s descendant retained ancestor cult as one element of religious values that served to legitimize his rule over his realm.

EAST JAVA’S KINGDOMS

The shift of political power from Central Java to East Java was initiated by incessant wars among various rakrayans in Central Java in early tenth century. This political conflict was followed by mayor earthquakes or volcanic eruptions which made the fertile rice plains of Kedu and Mataram temporarily uninhabitable. In addition to these, Eastern Java had a wide coastal plain that could be developed as a center of wet-rice production since the Brantas and Solo rivers could provide water or irrigation system for wet-rice agriculture. Since both rivers were navigable, local productions were easy to be transported from upper rivers to the coast and, vice versa, goods from the coast to the hinterland.

Before Airlangga ascended throne in early eleventh century, a great catastrophe took place in 1016 in which his father-in-law and predecessor to the throne Dharmawangsa Teguh was killed along with his kraton elite by Srivijaya. This attack caused him to leave for Wonogiri. After Srivijaya was defeated by Cola in 1024-1025,
Airlangga began to consolidate his authority over Java and Bali. When he came to power, he claimed himself as maharaja indicated by his title Sri Maharaja Rakrayan Halu and established a kraton in the northeastern corner of East Java, Kahuripan. His title indicated that he was originally one of various rakrayans who succeeded to elevate himself as maharaja after subduing other rakrayans. As revealed by Vlekke: “At first Airlanngga’s authority was limited. He ruled only over a district in the neighborhood of Surabaya, and many local potentates resisted his claims to overlordship. But eventually Airlangga succeeded in conquering his enemies and reuniting eastern Java under his rule” (Vlekke 1965:45). Though he resigned from throne to retire to a hermitage in 1045, it seemed to be that he was a patron of Vishnuism since his statue portrayed him as Vishnu riding on the man-eagle Garuda. But he retained sacred ritual for worshipping ancestors (Hall 1996:100).

The evolution of Hindu-Buddhist Javanese kingship culminated in the fourteenth century with the establishment of Majapahit in East Java. According to Hall, Majapahit was like earlier Javanese political centers since this Javanese state became the focus of a chain of patron-client relationships, with the state continuously attempted to maintain itself against the centrifugal forces of local-level alliance networks (Hall 1985:250). Javanese previous experience revealed that when an old Javanese kingdom was lost, local units competed with each other to create a new political center. To combat the divisive tendencies, Majapahit’s monarchs based their legitimacy not only on patronizing Hindu-Buddhist religions but also by fabricating links to Javanese monarchs who had ruled Java since the origin of a Javanese kingdom in the eighth century A.D. The king was depicted by Negarakertagama as an innately divine incarnation of a god who provided for his subjects’ well-being through maintaining order in his realm (Hall 1985:251). More than that, Hayam Wuruk, the greatest king of Majapahit, was combined in himself the trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Icwara (Schrieke 1957:87). The king offered sequential worship to his deified ancestors and other former monarchs as well as at the shrines of prominent mountain deities of Mount Lawu and Kelud; he also patronized the Goddess of the Southern Ocean, Ratu Lara Kidul, as committed by Hayam Wuruk at the seaside Lodaya temple (Hall 1996:113-114). It seemed to be that the latter event about the Goddess of the Southern Ocean was the first
evidence of the relationship between a Javanese king with Ratu Lara Kidul. But in this case, there was no mythology about sexual union between Hayam Wuruk and Ratu Lara Kidul. Thus, a Majapahit king searched for spiritual power as much as possible through conducting religious rituals. While a datu or a rama struggled for higher powerful status from lower social level through upper social level for gaining the highest status as ratu or maharaja by verifying his sakti or semangat; a Majapahit king continuously searched for semangat or spiritual power in order to verify that he was really a powerful king. This indicates that the accumulation of spiritual power is addressed to maintain or even elevate his authority as a king. If a king were believed to have little spiritual power, he would be considered ineligible to assume the status of king.

Modern historians assumed that the fall of Majapahit following the 1406 civil war. This was initiated by various subordinate regions of the kingdom that saw rivalry among members of royal family to struggle for the Majapahit’s throne after the Hayam Wuruk died in 1389. When the power of Majapahit faded, Islam gradually assumed power in some ports along northern coast of Java. In the early sixteenth century, Majapahit collapsed as a great Javanese Hindu kingdom.

JAVA NESE ISLAMIC KINGDOMS

Islam came to Java in the fourteenth century as indicated by Muslim gravestones in Tralaya, East Java. The religion was brought by Muslim traders who traveled to Java on the way to buy spices in the Maluku’s islands. Accordingly, Islam flourished in some coastal ports in Java such as Demak, Jepara, and Gresik. Indeed, an Islamic kingdom was founded in Demak by Raden Patah who reigned from 1500 through 1518. The king based his legitimacy on Islamic values and adopted title sultan as it was used in other Islamic realms. Sultan serves as khalifatullah, a deputy of Allah who is assigned to rule on the earth. But in the cases of Demak and Pajang, the installation of their sultans required consent from Islamic saints who initiated and preached Islamic teaching in Java. Since there were nine Islamic saints, they were called Wali Songo in Javanese term. It seems to be that one could not claim as a ruler without consents from those walis. Indeed, those Islamic saints played important roles not only in...
political sphere but also in social and cultural spheres. It is believed that they had spiritual power granted by Allah due to their sainthood. In this matter, Ricklefs argues that the legendary tales surrounding Wali Songo gave a roughly accurate picture of Javanese religions in the early years of the Islamic period: “Mystical, unorthodox by modern standards, and probably not so very different from Hindu-Javanese practices; pre-Islamic beliefs survived the conversion, and still survive today” (Ricklefs 1974:6). Thus, the belief in mystical power possessed by Wali Songo had facilitated the spread of Islam in Java.

The idea of mystical power penetrated deeply into Javanese perspective as revealed by Ricklefs when he interprets the contest for supreme power between Panembahan Senapati of Mataram and Sultan Adivijaya of Pajang. According to Ricklefs: “The babad stories are anything but sober historical accounts. They claim that a falling star spoke to Senapati, foretelling the greatness of Mataram and of Senapati’s descendants. Acting upon this prophecy, Senapati proceeded to establish liaison with the powerful Goddess of the Southern Ocean, in whose under water palace he spent three days and nights learning how to call up the armies of the spirits as well as pursuing more intimate studies” (Ricklefs 1974:13). On his return to Mataram, Senapati was recounted to encounter Sunan Kalijaga, one of the nine walis, who told him to fortify his court; even Sunan Giri, another wali, had said that the rise of Mataram was the Will of God (Ricklefs 1982:38).

It is told in Javanese chronicles that the mystical power led Senapati to win over Pajang in the 1580’s. The Javanese chronicles also expose how Sultan Agung, the grandson of Senapati, married with Ratu Lara Kidul to get advice and mystical power from the Goddess, but had hostile relations with Sunan Giri. Indeed, Sultan Agung sent an army expedition to defeat Giri in the late 1630’s.

The belief in the Goddess of Southern Ocean still prevails in nowadays Yogyakarta and Surakarta as indicated by rituals devoted to Ratu Lara Kidul, the Goddess of the Southern Ocean. Indeed, according to Soemardjan that the ability of a Javanese Islamic ruler to hold direct contact with the spirits of his ancestors, the guardians of Mount Merapi and Mount Lawu, and Ratu Lara Kidul, was one of the bases of traditional authority in the Javanese monarchy. It is also believed that some pusakas such as daggers, spears, sword, keris and...
flags are filled with mystical power which could enhance the divine status of and even legitimize the Javanese monarchs (Soemardjan 1962:18). A rival might dethrone a monarch simply by seizing his regalia (Heidhues 2000:37). Furthermore, it is still believed that the late Javanese kings would appear before their descendants to give advice or warning when the Javanese monarchs face the crucial problems. These phenomena indicated that the Javanese Islamic monarchs, especially those in the Southern Central Java retained elements of pre-Islamic values to legitimize their rules over their realms. There was no myth about the relationship of Javanese Islamic monarchs in northern coastal areas of Java with a spiritual goddess like Ratu Lara Kidul. On the other hand, though Wali Songo had some influences on Javanese monarchs in Southern Central Java, but they had more powerful in Northern Central Java since most of their centers of Islamic teachings were located along the north coast of Java.

It is worthy to note that during his reign, Sultan Agung brought Islam more deeply to Southern Central Java. In order to assert his legitimacy as a ruler of Mataram in 1621 he adopted the title of susuhunan, “He to whose feet other people must look up”; or “he whose feet I carry upon my head”, in other words “he who is above other people” (Vlekke 1965:129). This title was usually associated with Wali Songo whose influences were very impressive in Java at that time. It seems to be that by adopting the title susuhunan, Agung was perceived to have spiritual power as those of the nine walis (Reid 1993:180). When he recognized that his legitimacy declined after great failures to subdue the Dutch Companies in Batavia in the late 1620’s, Agung solicited the title of sultan from Mecca in 1639 since rulers of great Islamic empires in Middle East, India, and Turkey adopted the title of sultan. In 1641, Agung got the authorization for a new title, Sultan Abdullah Muhammad Maulana Matarani (Ricklefs, 1982:44). It seemed to be that he knew the title based on the idea of khalifatullah which has divine meaning as deputy of Allah on the earth. By adopting the title, he hoped his legitimacy would be restored since it was believed to have transcendental power from Allah. Thus, the title of sultan has glorious meaning for people under the reign of Islamic rulers.
CONCLUSION

The above analysis asserts that the emergence of kingship in early history of Java began when a man of prowess succeeded to elevate his status from datu or rama to ratu or raja. When other people recognized that he had sakti—spiritual power, that led him to have capabilities to solve problems, provide prosperity for other people, manage economic and political spheres or even subdue hostile rivals, he was then acknowledged to deserve the status of leader among his people. Since the idea of men of prowess related to people residing in certain areas such as wanua, watek, and then kingdom, he actually rule not only the people but also the region in which the people lived. The critical point for men of prowess was when various regional chiefs assumed the status of rakrayan—-it was the transitional status to ascend to the status of ratu or maharaja. Only a rakrayan who succeeded to perform his abilities to solve any problems not only in his region but also in other regions which led other rakrayans to acknowledge his powerful sakti was the best among them.

Rivalry among men of prowess increased sharply since there was a religious tradition that elevated men of prowess as ancestors when they passed away. As ancestors they were not only memorized as admirable persons but more than that, they were worshipped by their people. Their tombs or menhirs became sacred places for worshipping them. People believed that ancestors were still alive but unseen since they were souls or spirits. Ancestor cults spread over Southeast Asia including Java before the coming of Indic religions. Indeed, the Javanese retain the element of ancestor cults though they adopted Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

When the Indic religions came to Java, the best rakrayan such as Purnavarman, Sailendra, Sanjaya, and Airlangga, adopted the elements of Indic religions to legitimize their authorities to rule within their realms. The Indic religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, not only elevated their statuses as ratu or maharaja but also bestowed them with divine images. When they erected great temples such as Dieng Plateau Complex, Borobudur, and Loro Jonggrang Complex, the ideas behind the constructions were to glorify their images as patrons of Hinduism and Buddhism besides those temples served as places for pilgrimages.
The idea of men of prowess could also be applied with some adjustment when a person becomes a king due to his ascribed status as indicated by King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit. Though he was a king of a great Javanese kingdom, he continuously searched for spiritual power or sakti through conducting rituals for various sources of spiritual power such as gods, ancestors, spirits or guardians of mountains, and even the Goddess of Southern Ocean. By having such greater sakti or semangat, he was acknowledged as a powerful king of Majapahit. Indeed, the heyday of Majapahit was accomplished during his reign.

The rulers of Demak and Pajang adopted the title of sultan and based their legitimacies on the idea of khalifatullah since the penetration of Islam gradually increased into Java. Indeed, they were influenced heavily, especially Demak, by Wali Songo in political and religious spheres. It is difficult for them to install their rulers without the consents of Wali Songo since they were believed to have transcendental power granted by Allah. The influence of Wali Songo also had great impact on the social and cultural lives of Javanese society, but the penetration of Islam into Javanese in the southern central Java was weaker than that of northern central Java. It is indicated by the survival of pre-Islamic beliefs as one of the bases of legitimacy for their Islamic monarchs. But after all, the titles of Javanese rulers whether adopted from pre-Islamic or Islamic values are addressed to glorify the rulers. Only those who are believed to have sakti or divine power are legitimate to rule Java.

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