Symbolic meanings in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta: a transformation study

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Abstract—Yogyakarta is one of provinces in Indonesia with special district status. The city planning use concept catur gatra tunggal (four element in unity) that covers palace, square, mosque, and market. As one of the top artifacts of Javanese culture, Keraton Yogyakarta which was established by Prince Mangkubumi in 1756 has experienced a transformation of function and appearance. To comprehend the embodied messages, it is substantial to interpret the meaning of the symbols existing in Keraton Yogyakarta. This study reviews the transformation of meaning taking place at Keraton Yogyakarta. This study applies the method of observation, examination, assessment to the object of study, interview with informants, and study of Javanese manuscripts: Serat Salokapatra. The result of this study indicates that there are some significant transformations of meaning in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta between the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755-1939) and the reign of HB IX - HB X (1940 - 2018).

Index Terms—symbolic meaning, transformation study, Keraton Yogyakarta

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of the establishment of Keraton Yogyakarta was initiated with the signing of Giyanti Treaty or Palihan Nagari (the history of state division) held on Thursday Kliseun, 29 Rabiu I Akhir 1680 of Javanese Calendar or 13 February 1755 AD in the village of Giyanti. It was stated in Giyanti Treaty that the Kingdom of Mataram would be divided into two regions, Kabanaran Sultanate with Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat as the capital and Surakarta Sultanate with Surakarta as the capital (Sabdacaratama,2008).

Kabanaran Sultanate was ruled by Prince Mangkubumi who was appointed by his proponents to be the Sultan of Yogyakarta with the title Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono I, Senopati ing alaga, Abdurrahman Sajidin Panata Gama Kalifatullah. The meaning of the title is that the Sultan domiciled as the supreme war commander whose duty was to spread Islamic teachings in his kingdom. In addition to that, the Sultan also served as a representative of God on earth carrying out the main mission of memayu hayuning bawana (prospering world life) (Haryanto 2013, Hendro 2001, Sabdacaratama 2008).

Keraton Yogyakarta founded by Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono I in 1756 owns a traditional Javanese architectural style. It can be clearly observed from the application of roof shapes (limasan, tajug, and joglo) on the buildings in the palace complex. However, during the reign of Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono VIII (1921-1939), a significant renovation toward the architectural formation of Keraton Yogyakarta was carried out (Prijotomo, 2004). Some of the renovated buildings include Tratag Pagelaran, Tratag Sitihinggil, and Regol Danapratapa (Bangunjiwa,2015).

Along with the Dutch colonialization in Indonesia came the influence of Dutch colonial architectural style called Indische Empire Style (Hadinoto, 1996). The Empire style is a style of neoclassical architecture that struck Europe at that time. In relation to the acculturation of Javanese traditional architecture, it is commonly referred to as the European style, yet it is more to the European Neoclassical style (Prijotomo, 2004). The characteristics of this style are: it is symmetrical, it owns thick walls, its ceilings are high, and it applies Greek columns (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian) (Hadinoto,1996). The European Neoclassical style is also applied to Keraton Yogyakarta’s renovation by HB VIII.

Transformations of Keraton Yogyakarta also occurred in the post-independence period of Republic of Indonesia (during the reign of HB IX) in 1956 by building Sasono Hinggil Dwi Abad to replace the South Bangsal Sitiinggil. In addition to that, during the reign of HB X in 1992, a new building was erected in Kedhaton courtyard. This new building is HB IX Museum, which was built to commemorate HB IX himself who was appointed as a national hero.

These transformations brought about the changes in symbolic meaning of Keraton Yogyakarta. In connection with the meaning of symbols, the transformations can basically be classified into two, namely: the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755 - 1939) and the reign of HB IX-HB X (1940-2018).

II. METHOD OF STUDY

This study focuses on the reading of symbolic meanings in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta which is an artifact of Javanese culture. Culture itself according to Geertz is a system of meaning and symbol of the actualization and expression in a
particular community. Symbols can be objects, events, speeches, or written forms that are given meaning by humans (Geertz, 1992). The readings of meanings on Keraton Yogyakarta is executed by directly observing the building, interviewing informants who understand the history of the palace, and reviewing historical manuscripts, among others, Serat Salokapatra. Serat Salokapatra contains the myths of plants and buildings inside the palace complex of Keraton Yogyakarta implemented in the form of tembang macapat (Sunjata, 1995).

To obtain validity of data in this study, the researcher applies triangulation method. Validity test through triangulation is executed because testing the validity of information in qualitative research can not be performed with statistical test tools (Moleong, 2015). The validity of data is guaranteed by comparing data obtained from a particular source or method with data obtained from other sources or methods. In this study, the validity of data is obtained by comparing visual observation result of Keraton Yogyakarta with information from interview results as well as related history documents.

III. PERIODIZATION OF KERATON YOGYAKARTA’S ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The reading of symbolic meanings on Keraton Yogyakarta is exercised by periodizing based on certain time periods. This periodization is executed because of the symbolic meaning characters that will shift along with the shift of time. Hence, contextualization is required in reading the symbolic meanings.

From the review of architectural transformations occurred in Keraton Yogyakarta, the time periods can be sorted into two.

A. Based on expression:

a. The period of 1756-1934, it started from the establishment of the palace to right before the renovation. The dominant appearance or expression of this period was a Javanese architectural building with the roof shape of Limasan and Joglo.

b. The period of 1935-2018, it started from the period after the massive renovation undertaken by HB VIII to the present (2018). In this time period, the dominant appearance or expression has been the emergence of a mixture between Dutch colonial architectural style and Javanese traditional architecture.

B. Based on function:

a. The period of 1756-1968, started from the establishment of the palace which was utilized as the king's palace and central government. During this period, the palace was very private and protective.

b. The period of 1969-2018, since the Palace was opened to the public as a tourism object of Javanese culture. Some buildings are utilized for art performances, Javanese culture and Javanese history’s museum.

Periodization based on appearance and function occurs due to internal and external factors. The main internal factor is the concept of Keraton’s architectural philosophy by HB I; manunggaling kawulo lan gusti and sangkan paranaging dumadi. Architecturally, during the reign of HB I-HB VII, Keraton Yogyakarta did not undergo many changes. Major transformations in the appearance took place when HB VIII renovated (1921-1934) some of the main buildings of the palace by incorporating European Neoclassical elements, while significant function transformations occurred after Keraton Yogyakarta joined the Unitary State of Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and the palace is opened to the public. Thus, the following discussions would be divided into 2 studies; the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755-1939) and the reign of HB IX-HB X (1940-2018). Various political, art, cultural and architectural policies adopted by the Sultan also influence the transformations of the palace’s architecture. These policies are as follows: (table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Political Policies</th>
<th>Architectural Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HB I</td>
<td>Principle of sabda pendita ratu tan kena wula-wula, faithful to the promise.</td>
<td>- Designing and building Keraton Yogyakarta. On 7 October 1756, it began to be resided. (dwi naga rasa tunggal/1682 Jawa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1755-1792)</td>
<td>- Succeeded in merging the interests of the palace and the interests of Dutch colonial</td>
<td>- The building of Gedhong (Gedhong Kuning) as the residence of King until HB IX.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- “The palace is devoted to its people”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB II</td>
<td>Opposing Daendels &amp; Raffles. - The palace was divided into 2: Kasultanan Yogyakarta and Kadipaten Pakualam</td>
<td>- The building of Gedhong Pakualam</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1792-1812)</td>
<td>- Dutch government prohibited the Palace to interact with other kingdoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB III</td>
<td>- The relationship between HB IV and Dutch government was good, yet the relationship between HB IV and the people was vice versa</td>
<td>- Succeded in merging the Palace to right before the renovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1812-1814)</td>
<td>- A revolt from the people occurred.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB IV</td>
<td>(1814-1823, reigned at the age of 10)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- HB IV was known as figurehead of Dutch colonial/government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HB V</td>
<td>Accompanied by Trusteeship Council. - Diponegoro War occurred in 1825-1830, Prince Diponegoro was assisted by Kiai Mojo and Sentot Prawirodirjo to fight Dutch colonial. - HB V had a good relationship with the Dutch government, with passive war politics.</td>
<td>- The building of Gedhong Purworetna, utilized as private office of HB IX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1823-1855, reigned at the age of 3)</td>
<td>- The palace was devoted to its people</td>
<td>- The building of Gedhong Pakualam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- HB V had a good relationship with the Dutch government, with passive war politics.</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1. Political and Architectural Policies of Yogyakarta Sultanate

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From table 1, it can be reviewed that there are some transformations in the function of Keraton Yogyakarta. In the reign of HB I-HB VIII, the Palace was more functioning as a royal institution while in the reign of HB IX-HB X, once opened to the public, the palace serves as a cultural institution.

**IV. THE REIGN OF HB I–HB VIII (1755–1939)**

The colonial atmosphere that accompanied the construction of Keraton Yogyakarta and the HB I background of a military strategist, made it possible for the design of the palace to function not only as a center of government but also as a center of defense. This can be identified from the construction of the fort with a height of 3.5 M and a thickness of 5 M, surrounding the palace with 5 gates whose upper part is curved, commonly known as Pelengkung. These 5 Pelengkung can be found in: the south, called Pelengkung Nirbaya (Gading), the west, called Pelengkung Jagabaya (Taman Sari), the north (there are 2), called Pelengkung Jagasoera (Ngasem) and Pelengkung Tarunasona (Wijilan), and the east, called Pelengkung Madyasura (figure 1).

**Source:** From various sources
During the reign of HB II, Pelengkung Madyasura (Pelengkung is kind of region gate) was destroyed by British troops and the gate then being closed until the present. Defense elements can also be observed from the thickness of the fortress that can be utilized for riding patrols and train. Each Regol (Regol is kind of gate) was equipped with bastion, which functioned as a cannon as well as a guard post (Sumalyo, 2011).

In addition to defense considerations, the palace is also designed as a medium to talk about the nature of human life’s journey. It is represented in the layouts of buildings on the north-south axis. The layouts are as follows (being described in sequence from south to north): in the most southern part is South Sea, Panggung Krapyak, South Square, Keraton Complex, North Square, Golong Gilig Monument, and Mount Merapi. Mount Merapi is symbolized as lingga and the southern sea as yoni, the fusion between lingga and yoni embodies fertility symbol. As a whole, the palace complex, in the form of buildings and trees, holds symbolic meanings as follows: (Haryanto, 2013)

a) Panggung Krapyak, as a symbol of holy spirit’s place of origin, sangkan paraning, a prospective baby. From the view of cosmology, psychology, philosophy, and symbolism of Javanese culture, Krapyak is a picture of the place where a person was born.
b) Alun-alun Selatan (South Square), containing sand owning fragmentary nature, a symbol of a child who still put his own interests above the interests of others.
c) A pair of banyan trees called "Wok". "Wok" derives from the word “brewok” or beard that symbolizes a child who gets older and becomes a teenager.
d) Trees of Pakel and Kweni, symbols of teenagers who have reached their maturity and are brave (wani) to express their feelings to the opposite sex.
e) Gayam tree, a symbol of peacefulness and tranquility (ayem) to describe a pair of young adults who are in love.
f) South Bangsal Sitiinggil, where the seeds of a male and a female meet. It is represented by the encounter of Palen Cempora flowers (white, male) with red Soka flowers (female).
g) Pamengkang Road, a symbol of the path for the birth of a baby.
h) Kemandungan, a symbol of a baby in the womb that is about to be born.
i) Kemagangan, a symbol of a child who is ready to be mature.
j) Bangsal Kencana, represents the light of nobleness and livelihood, like the sun that shines on the earth.
k) Bangsal Srimanganti, represents a place for guests to await the arrival of the king (where the Sultan welcome important guests).
l) Bangsal Trajumas, represents a place for courtiers to weigh the good, the right, and the wrong (where the palace officials welcome the important guests)
m) Bangsal Fonconiti, ponco = five, niti = to check, so the meaning is to investigate five issues. It is a place where the Sultan adjudicates people who violate the rules.

A) Alun-alun Utara (North Square), alun = waves. It pictures the life of human being in the world who will encounter the wave of life, either happy or sad moment, as well as prosperous or miserable life.

Figure 1. Complex of Keraton Yogyakarta inside of the fort at 1800 (source: Sumalyo, 2011)

Figure 2. Philosophic axis ‘Sangkan Paraning Para’ at Keraton Yogyakarta (source: google earth processed by author, 2017)
V. THE REIGN OF HB IX–HB X (1940–2018)

The biggest transformation during the reign of HB IX took place when Indonesia became an independent republic and Yogyakarta Sultanate joined the NKRI. During this period, the palace gradually opened itself to the public. From time to time, there has been more and more visitors visited the palace. In its development, tourist access to the palace is divided into two, each with a different entrance ticket. This is in line with the consideration of the vastness of Keraton Yogyakarta complex. The first zone is the northernmost of Keraton complex, Pagelaran complex and North Sitihinggil complex. The second zone is from North Kemandungan complex or Kebe courtyard to Kedhaton complex. In the southern part of Kedhaton, there are still courtyards of Kemagangan, Kemanggungan, and South Sitihinggil which are opened to the public without tickets.

Tratag Pagelaran was named Tratag Rambat at the time of HB I-HB VII. Besides Pagelaran complex, Sitihinggil Complex is also included in the first zone. The buildings within this complex are Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil located "inside" Tratag Sitihinggil and Bangsal Witono located in the south of Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil.

During the reign of HB I-HB VIII, the buildings within the palace complex were utilized for the purpose of government activities (figure 3, 4, 5), for Sultan’s coronation ceremony and for Sultan’s meditation (at Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil, the atmosphere is very sacred). Because they embraced activities that were transcendental, the spaces in the palace carried a sacred meaning. Hierarchically, the spaces are: Bangsal Proboyekso, Bangsal Kencono, Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil, Bangsal Witono, Bangsal Ponconiti, Bangsal Pangrawit, Bangsal Sri Manganti and Bangsal Trajumas.
between the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755-1939) and the reign of HB IX-HB X (1940-2018). The transformations are as follows:

a) The imaginary axis, from a philosophical symbol, transforms into a performative symbol.

The philosophical axis of North-South as a symbol of Sangkan Panaran Dumadi (from which the human comes from and to which the human destination are) turns into a performative axis, tourist gallery; from South Square to North Square is a Javanese art and cultural gallery, from North Square to Pal Putih Monument is a typical Yogyakarta shopping and culinary gallery.

b) The architecture of the palace, from modesty symbol to grandeur symbol.

c) Golong Gilig Monument, from the philosophical symbol of Manunggaling Kawalul an Gusti, transforms into Pal Putih Monument, the symbol of tourist existence (via selfie and wefie).

d) The fortress, from protective and defensive symbols, transforms into a boundary symbol of Keraton’s tourist zone.

e) Regol, from a symbol of human life’s journey, transforms into a transition symbol of Keraton’s gallery zone.

f) Typical ornaments in palace buildings with flora-fauna patterns, calligraphy and sengkalan, as symbols of king's existence, transforms into visual aesthetic symbols.

g) Plants in the palace complex, as a symbol of a series of moral messages, transforms into complementary shade of the building.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In general, there are significant transformations in the meaning of symbols in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta

References


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