HIERARCHICAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE SOCIAL SPACES
FORMATION IN TRADITIONAL LIMASAN HOUSE OF JAVANESE MIDDLE-CLASS SOCIETY

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Abstract

The importance of hierarchically social structure for Javanese people is reflected in their house and home behavior. Room organization and the daily practice of social interaction occurred in it shows meaning of social hierarchy in the family. Based on the theories of territoriality, this paper aims to describe how the social structure of Laweyan batik merchants, as a middle-class society in Surakarta who had been living in their traditional limasan houses for generations, were implemented to the formation of the social spaces within the house. The remaining wealthy batik merchant houses built around the end of 19th century until the beginning of 20th century in Kampung Batik Laweyan, were chosen as case study in the research. The case study chosen were restricted to the houses that were still being occupied by the batik merchant descendants whom inherited their batik business. The discussion used qualitative descriptive method with Saussure model approach to review the usage of rooms for social activities. The paper highlights only on specific areas used for main social activities, which were called pendhapa, dalem ageng, and gandhok. The review method first analyzed the dweller’s territoriality behavior as marker (signifier) and correlating them to hierarchical social structure (signified). The main elements that will be discussed here are center or domain of space with its boundaries, and the accesses or paths into and out from each domain.

Keywords: social structure, territorial behavior, Javanese, limasan house, middle-class society

INTRODUCTION

Javanese Concept of Hierarchical Social Structure

Javanese traditional community has always kept the importance of hierarchical structure in their social life. They have had built their culture referred to the palace aristocrats as their patronage. The kings in the Javanese palaces would brought forth wisdoms and issued guidance about how to live appropriately as Javanese, and the Javanese society shall followed. The traditional Javanese people, who were much influenced by Hindunese and Buddhist teachings, would worship their kings (sultans) as representation of God that have the authority as messengers of God. This palace-centralized ideology led to class-stratification in Javanese social life. In their social life, the traditional Javanese categorized the society into several divisions, which are: 1) ‘wong cilik’ and ‘priyayi’. The division was identified by the wealth and position in the society. ‘Wong cilik’ are those common people living communally within the traditional villages around the Javanese palaces, mostly worked as farmers or laborers of landlords, traders. While ‘priyayi’:
the kings, aristocrat families, and palace officials who lived within the palace neighborhood; 2) ‘pinisepuh’ and ‘kawula mudha’. The division was identified by the age. ‘Pinisepuh’ are those elderly whom respected because of their wisdom. While ‘kawula mudha’ are younger people that are considered as immature and therefore have less-wisdom than the older people; 3) ‘sedulur’ and ‘wong liya’. The division was identified by the blood and marriage connection. ‘Sedulur’ are those who are related by blood and marriage connection. While ‘wong liya’ are other people that are neither related by marriage or blood connection; 4) ‘Santri’ and ‘abangan’. The division was identified by how one performed their (moslem) religion. ‘Santri’ are those who strictly perform moslem way of life. The moslem way of life considered for Javanese is based on the teachings spreaded by ‘Wali Songo’. While ‘abangan’ are those who perform mix of moslem and Hindu-Javanese way of life. (Suwardi, 2003). Other than those divisions above, the Javanese also emphasizes the difference of gender as human nature.

**Harmony and Respect Among Diversity**

The Javanese aims to reach peaceful harmony they called ‘*rukun*’, that the world would be an ideal place if everyone live together harmoniously even though there were differences between them. These varying social divisions of society shall live in harmony through respect of each other. This norm is taught to Javanese children through a so-called word of wisdom, “*Mamayu hayuning bawana*”, means every human shall maintain peaceful harmony and practice a balance life (related to the nature and also the society) to create a serene and happy life. Therefore, Javanese people seemed like avoiding conflicts, in order to reach peaceful harmony.

To be ‘a Javanese’ or usually known as ‘*dadi wong*’ (= becoming a person) for Javanese means performing appropriate attitude and way of life accordingly to their social status. Therefore the Javanese developed social ethics and rules to obey when interacting with others. Since childhood, Javanese parents would teach their children about manners and how to put themselves properly in their social community.

Their social ethics include how to communicate with others according to their social status verbally and physically. The Javanese has three kind of dialects which have to be used to communicate accordingly: 1) *Boso Ngoko*, usually used for daily practice within close peer group; 2) *Boso Madya*, usually used for daily practice with elder people or respected people, such as communication between student and teacher at school, staff and the boss at work; 3) *Basa Krama Inggil*, usually used in the noble community or to communicate with respected people with higher social status.

In social gatherings of Javanese community, elders would have to be seated in the priority, central place of event. While children and youngsters should keep themselves aside and sit quietly in lower height than the elders. It is forbidden in Javanese culture to talk in standing position to a seated elder.

Concerned with the value of respect to others accordingly, the Javanese believe that the respected and honored people in the society should be the ones that have reached their “*drajad- semat-kramat*” which means “position-wealth-charisma”. “*Drajad*” or position is likely related to the nobility status that depends on the relation with the aristocrats in “*kraton*”. Other identifier of “*drajad*” can be reached from getting a good position in government office. Wealth is
not only related to how much money one could have, but also related to how to dress and styling appropriately. Wealthy men then would wear expensive clothing sewn with such style only wealthy people could wear.

The hierarchical structure concept is also then implemented to their traditional structure of the house. Javanese traditional people know several types of traditional house that should be built according to the owner’s social status. They are categorized by the building typology and named after the roof type, which are: 1) ‘Joglo’ house, is the type of house for the aristocrats or ‘priyayi’. Common people or ‘wong cilik’ are forbidden to build this kind of house for their dwellings; 2) ‘kampung’ house, is the type of house for common people; 3) ‘limasan’ house, is the type of house for common people whom in some circumstances such as wealth or position of neighborhood heads, considered as superior than the other ‘wong cilik’, 4) ‘panggang-pe’ house, is the typically service house usually used as the back of the ‘kampung’ house. This type of house is used for daily supported activities, such as food barns, workshops, and pet stalls.

**Javanese Home Territoriality: Concept of Home within the Society**

A house for Javanese means ‘a place of beginning or starting point, and also place to return to’ (Ronald, Arya, 1990). Referring to this meaning, a Javanese house for their dwellers is interpreted as a detached territory within the universe, territory with definite boundaries separating the 'small universe' of the home from the 'big universe' or the surrounding nature and society. From this statement as starting point, this research main topic is about the territorial behavior of the traditional limasan house dwellers. The discussion highlights the room usage of limasan traditional house, which typically used for commoners whom reached higher social status, or middle-class society to be exact. It is quite interesting since the Javanese previously never recognized the existence of middle-class society in their hierarchical social structure. The purpose are to explore how the dweller of limasan houses represent their social status positioning in the hierarchical society culture according to Javanese social principle values of harmony (rukun) and respect (hormat). The territorial behavior discussed here is divided into outward social function (relation to public) and inward social function (relation inbetween the dwellers). The later discussion on the room usage will be explained by using theories of territoriality. The study used qualitative descriptive method with Saussure model approach, that will review each room usage as marker (sign) and correlating them to hierarchical social structure (signifier). Hence, the main elements that will be discussed here are about: 1) center or domain of space, 2) its boundaries, and 3) access or path, that are being used as identifier of hierarchical social space (Norberg-Schulz, 1985). Territoriality is often identified as related to geographical markers. It is being used for produce meanings on one’s identity in the socio-cultural point of view. Raffestin (1983) stated that territoriality is a mean of social communication. Infact, territoriality is product of how men make meaning to a space, where socio-cultural values are being represented in the environment arrangement as their identity to the external world (i.e. ownership, social status, reputation), and to the internal world (i.e. sense of belonging, rootedness, place attachment, and much more). Following the argument above, territoriality is not just being regarded to physical spaces, but also to the relational non-physical content and context within.
As explained above, limasan house named after the shape of roof structure. The limasan house roof is characterised by a four-sided sloping trapezoidal roof with two pointed locations at the top. It is likely has a square ground plan with a raised floor standing on eight or more even numbered wooden pillar, depending on the size of the building. Horizontal beams and the four (or more) middle posts which connecting the pillars, support the wooden frame roof construction.

Limasan houses were previously built as part of Javanese joglo houses, functioning as shelter for the living room. But over time, people began to build limasan houses independently without the joglo building, mostly in urban areas. These people who built and lived in the limasan houses, were indeed been achieved public recognition of higher status or reputation in the society. When the owner of houses with a kampung roof type increase their wealth they develop their house to have a limasan type roof to express their higher social status. In the former era, even commoners were not allowed to build limasan house for their dwelling.

The Laweyan Batik Merchants: The Middle-Class Society

For the observation purpose, Kampung Batik Laweyan was chosen as a case study. Kampung Batik Laweyan has long been known for its unique characteristic way of life, distinct from the other commoners’ community in Surakarta. For centuries, the Javanese in Surakarta lived under the power of Javanese kingdom as their patronage. Farming or running land for landlords or the palace aristocrats had always been their bread and butter. People with jobs other than farming, especially those who work independently were considered dishonorable.

The famous known main occupation of the Laweyan community until now is producing and trading batik. Formerly developed as an enclave society in Surakarta due to the exclusion from the other commoners, these Laweyan batik merchants created distinctively hierarchical social structure among them. The structure were created according to the organizational structure of batik business, with the wealthiest merchants functioned as the capitalist, being the helm of the structure. Below these merchants, there are several batik merchants with specific expertise: ‘mbabar’, ‘wedel’, and ‘prembe’. Following these specific expert merchants, there are specialized workers called ‘buruh’ and their coolies (kuli). The batik merchants families at the triumphal moment of batik trading were commonly lived together as big families under one roof; mostly three generations counted in them. The women of the successful batik merchants’ family were acknowledged as the brain behind the business. They were called ‘mbok mase’.

Even though today, less of the remaining Laweyan batik merchants produce batik in traditional way, they are still running batik textile trading business with the material supply from other batik craftsmen in the suburban villages of Surakarta. Some of them shift their business to dressmaker or apparel wholesaler.

DISCUSSION

Building Typology of Laweyan Batik Merchants’ Limasan House

Laweyan batik merchants that have been running massive textile producing and trading for hundred years and became wealthy men, were
recognized as one of the Javanese community who built *limasan* houses for their dwelling in Surakarta. Around the end of 19th century until the beginning of 20th century, Laweyan batik trading reached their triumphal moment. At this time, the wealthy merchants built large *limasan* houses, instead of *kampung* houses, and decorated them with mixed style of Javanese, Victorian colonial style, and even a bit of Chinese style. There are several type and size of *limasan* houses found in *Kampung Batik* Laweyan, which are: 1) Typical *limasan* house, which are mostly built. 2) Joglo-*limasan* house, which has detached structure of ‘*pendhapa*’ with joglo roof. Unfortunately, at the time of this research conducted, there are very few buildings remaining complete; and 3) Gedong *limasan* house which adapted *Indische Tropische* style (see figure 1a, b, and c below).

Since Laweyan community has been running their batik producing business inside their homes, the typical house that they were using are *limasan* houses as main part of the home, with additional buildings in the both sides and in the back to support the batik production. They called the main house, ‘griya wingking’ (see figure 2 below).

![Figure 1a. Pendhapa in Typical Limasan House](Source: Setyoningrum, 2013)

![Figure 1b. Pendhapa covered with gypsum panel in a Joglo Limasan House](Source: Setyoningrum, 2013)

![Figure 1c. Pendhapa used as restaurant in a Gedong Limasan House](Source: Setyoningrum, 2014)
1) Pendhapa; 2) Pringgitan; 3) Dalem ageng; 4) Senthong; 5) Right & Left side Gandhok; 6) Pawon/Gadri; 7) Back Gandhok; 8) Pavillion

Figure 2. Typical plan of Laweyan batik merchants' limasan house
(Source: Setyoningrum, 2013)

'Griya wingking’ consists of pendhapa (functioned as public guests reception area), pringgitan (the clear space between pendhapa and dalem ageng), dalem ageng (functioned as the main living area), senthong (functioned as private bedroom for the elders), and pawon (back of the main house, usually functioned as kitchen or storage room for ready to sell batik textiles). Whereas the additional building consist of left side and right side gandhok (functioned as domestic daily activity area), pavilion (staff office and storage for batik business, some of the houses built a second floor functioned as a ‘langgar’ or prayer room built in this area), and the back gandhok (used for wet processes of producing batik).

The Laweyan limasan houses had typical horizontal room organization, just like other Javanese limasan houses, which are symmetrically structured according to human body: head-body-and feet. This symbolization of human appears to influence the usage of the rooms. Each domain represented the functional use of human body. ‘Head’ area shows the owner’s identity and act as a communicative function to the external world. The areas representing the head are the front house areas. There are pendhapa in the center of ‘head’; pavilion and ‘pendhapa cilik’ located in both sides of pendhapa. ‘Body’ area is where the core domestic activities take part, referred to the vital organs of human body. The pringgitan, dalem ageng, left and right side gandhok belong to the ‘body’ area. While the ‘feet’, area supports both areas above. The back gandhok is considered as the ‘feet’ of the house.

These three domains usually constructed with different level of floor height to differentiate the hierarchy of importance. The highest level is dalem ageng, following by pringgitan, pendhapa, and gandhok, then pavillion, pawon, and back gandhok have the lowest floor height.

'Dalem ageng'

In the ‘body’ of the house, dalem ageng was always put as the highest valuable part of the house than the other areas. Physically, dalem ageng were enclosed by four-sided wall built from wooden panels. The wall to the senthong area was decorated with wooden-carved wall details. Dalem ageng were generally equipped with an unoccupied small room called 'krobongan'. 'Krobongan' was dedicated as a shrine for Dewi Sri, the Goddess of Fertility and Prosperity. The form of 'krobongan' is sort of a chamber or closet, which is never meant to be occupied by any person, but always filled with
beautiful bedding equipments. For a marriage celebration organized in the house, this is where the bride and groom sit during the ceremony. Nowadays, 'krobongan' are already hard to find, because the value behind it was against the moslem norms. Other than 'krobongan', most families in Laweyan do not put furniture in dalem ageng. The raised flooring was kept empty to maintain flexible use for several social interaction settings: to chat in-group, eat together, sleep, and do other quiet work. Mostly they only cover the raised flooring with mat and put few cushions to make the place more comfortable.

*Dalem ageng* is the place where the men of the family reside when they come home from work. Therefore, it is always considered as male area. Meanwhile, the women reside in the left or right side *gandhok* most of the time, generally to do domestic works. When men of the family were out of the house, women and children seldom use the dalem ageng for activities. In fact, dalem ageng was meant for quiet activities, such as chatting and discuss family matters. If the families have many children, they would use dalem ageng as communal sleeping area for children at night, and then roll-up the mattresses at the day to let the space for social activities. Even being used as children’s sleeping area at night, the children would not perched around in the dalem ageng during the day, instead they would perched in the left or right side *gandhok* or in *pendhapa* cilik.

Hence, it can be said that younger unmarried family members would not have any claimed individual room until they are married. After marriage, the newlywed child and the spouse are eligible to have a private room in right or left side *senthong*. Though, some respondent said that the married children still sleep together in dalem ageng, and other respondent said that they are granted a room in the pavillion area.

The women and children often feel awkward to be in the dalem ageng when the men were not in the house. This behavior signified the Javanese patriarchal values where men of the family have the greatest supreme and authority, honored for their wisdom. The women would take part as the preserver of the family, which is more like a managerial role that is not less important than the men’s role.

*Dalem ageng* was also used for arrangement of any formal rituals of the family, such as the wedding of family member. Nowadays, when the descendants rarely arrange traditional rituals, they use the dalem ageng area as the prayer room. In such cases when dalem ageng are functioned as commercial retail space, 'krobongan' were used as the display of expensive special collection items.

The accesses to and from the dalem ageng are through the doors from the *pendhapa* area (typically there are three doors in the same size), doors from the right and left side *gandhok*, and doors from the right and left side *senthong*. The two doors connecting dalem ageng and senthong area were rarely used for access, because mostly family members access the senthong area from the side *gandhok*, where common core domestic activities take place. Most of the time, the dwellers used the doors from the left and right side *gandhok* to enter dalem ageng. Once pendhapa used for guest reception, the center door connecting pendhapa and dalem ageng was opened to give access to serve the guest.

**'Pendhapa’**

*Pendhapa* is located in the 'head' of the house. It
is usually a spacious open space with wooden fences in the three sides, and a direct passageway on the back to *pringgitan* area. Although *pendhapa* is considered as formal social place, still hierarchically, its position is lower or less-sacred than *dalem ageng*. More over, there are also small terraces that they called 'pendhapa cilik' or small *pendhapa*, which are located in front of the right and left side *gandhok*.

*Pendhapa* in typical and gedong *limasan* house share the same roof with *dalem ageng* additional columns called 'saka penanggap', which are supporting the *limasan* roof extension to form a terrace. While in *joglo limasan* house, *pendhapa* is built under independent *joglo* roof structure. It is usually beautifully decorated with mixed of Javanese and Indische style ornaments in the three symmetrical doors to the *dalem ageng* area, vent-holes above the doors, and the pillars and fences, and also the floor pattern. This space is usually kept empty with minimal furniture to maintain flexibility of use, but nowadays they put a few set of seating furniture or use it as batik retail display.

When there are no guests coming to the house, *pendhapa* is used for daily activities, such as for children playing, women of the neighborhood chatting and doing preparation work of batik dyeing, and other public social activities. But when guests coming to the house to meet any married men of the family, this place should be cleared out of daily activities for guest reception. The condition would be different if the guests came for the women or children of the family. They would welcome their guests in *pendhapa* cilik, which is located in front of *gandhok*, rather than in *pendhapa*.

'Gandhok'

*Gandhok* being used as social space for closed family of batik merchants is the right and left side *gandhok*. Each accommodates family daily life and also batik production domestic activities. They are located under the side extension of *limasan* roof. They are each equipped with raised floor or fixed bench like the one in *dalem ageng*, usually made of tiles, which is used for seating area for any domestic work that has to be done (eg: ironing, designing batik pattern, sewing for women, or doing school homework for children). Formerly, the elder men in the family seldom use this place while they are at home.

Right and left side *gandhok* are also used to access the back of the house. The access would cross the room in half or some is set in the edge of the room. In general, *gandhok* area are the most integrated room in *limasan* Javanese house.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis from discussion above shows that a Javanese house, especially on the rooms functioned as social space, can be seen as sign of hierarchical social structure of specific middle class Javanese family. *Dalem ageng*, *pendhapa*, and right or left side *gandhok* show the importance of how Javanese family put themselves in the hierarchical social structure accordingly. Javanese parents would teach manners and social norms since their children were young based on the value of respect, which implemented to how they use the space of their house. Javanese children would not eligible to have their private space until they marry or considered 'dadi wong'. Meanwhile both men and women have their own space regarding their duty in the family.
Reference