WHEN LOCAL VALUES AND GLOBALIZATION MEET:
An Observation on the Life of the Javenese Society*)
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[Chapter 32, Indonesian Constitution 1945: ‘The state develops national culture of Indonesia.’ Elaboration: The culture of the nation (Indonesia) is the culture that emerges as the fruits of the endeavors of the people of Indonesia. The old and original culture as the packs of the culture in regions all over Indonesia is recognized as the culture of the nation. Cultural efforts should be oriented to progress in refinement, culture, and unification without rejecting new elements from foreign culture which will be able to develop and enrich the culture of the nation and raise the level of the humanity of the Indonesian people.]

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Ever since the issue of globalization started rolling from the northern continental countries (western Europe and USA), globalization has increasingly melted boundaries in the world. It has opened the way for the expansion of the fields for the cultivation of western culture products to the south (developing countries). It is extremely difficult for the southern cultural product to penetrate western Europe or USA. While Michael Jackson and Madonna have been able to freely penetrate the southern continents, it has not turned out to be easy for the Tayub and Badui dances, kethoprak drama, and other cultural products coming from Java, Indonesia, for example, to penetrate the northern continents. It has brought about the view that the southern countries, including Indonesia, are not more than markets that can only absorb western products. The southern countries are barely able to conduct negotiations because almost all capital, human resources, access to technology, and centers of information are under the control of western countries. The question that arises here concerns what will become of the local culture (and all its products) in Indonesia.
It has to be admitted that not all that come from the western culture are less than good. On the other hand, not all that are present in the culture that does not come from the west is good. What are good and what are otherwise are everywhere. It is only that the flow of the culture that comes from the west hits the local culture so strongly that it is very much possible that the local culture will die out in a most grievous way.

In connection with that, there are at least two things to do. First (as an external effort), we behave towards any ‘foreign’ culture about to enter with good judgment and, second (as an internal effort), we raise and return local values to the surface. In response to the entrance of the ‘foreign’ culture, we select what it is loaded with. We certainly do not take any influence which ‘does not quite fit in’ while any positive or even prospective loads (values) are welcome with open hands. As for the internal effort, what we must do is make them (‘the local society’) feel close again to the local values which have been found to be positive in nature.

What will then happen is that the ‘foreign’ cultural load is not made to hit the local cultural load or vice versa. Neither is the ‘foreign’ culture allowed to push away the local culture, something which, if allowed, will put the local culture in a marginal position in its own home. It is thought that both should be given room to have synergy with each other. Whit it then the existence of the local society will become increasingly more firm.

This modest writing takes as its point of departure a case occurring on the Javenese society – one ethnic group – in Indonesia. On one hand, they are obviously inundated with ‘foreign’ cultural influence. On the other hand, though it is not known for sure wether the aforementioned has something to do with it, they start to abandon and forget their own cultural values. This particularly befalls the younger generation. Most of them feel behind the times or lack self-confidence
when they have to have contact with local values. As a result, what is increasingly perceived, as it is said, is that ‘wong Jawa wis ilang Jawane’ (the Javanese have lost their being Javenese) while the Javanese culture is actually full of teachings about ‘praiseworthy character’.

Such teachings are among the means - together with religious morality and Pancasila (Indonesia’s nationality philosophy) – which can be used to resist the negative effect of any change in the world. Any talk about teachings concerning good character will be related to one’s social conduct anytime and anywhere. It covers moral codes, courtesies, manners, and ethics.

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We are quite aware of three centers of education which are greatly influential in the process of character education, namely, the home (the family), the school, and the community (social environment).

a. Home (Family)

A child becomes acquainted with norms and value systems for the first time at home. The first and main process of education goes on at home. We are certain that in a good family a good personality will also be formed. There used to be what is termed ‘dongeng sebelum tidur’ (bedtime story), which implies that parents tell their children a story before the children go to sleep. Such a custom is quite positive in nature because, besides being enjoyable able to lull the children to sleep, the stories told contain values about good and evil, what is right and what is wrong, or beauty and ugliness. The characters in the stories can be people, animals, plants, or anything else in nature.

Bedtime stories are thus quite strategic media for character education. Unfortunately today such an ideal situation is difficult to get. Parents no longer have a chance to tell their children stories at bedtime. Today’s parents seem to be too busy with their own affairs. Even talking and eating together with the whole family are now becoming increasingly rare. (Worse, children today deserve to be called ‘the servants’ children’ or ‘cows children’. They can be called the former because all children’s care and anything else to the children’s interest are
delegated to servants. The children can be called ‘cows’ children’ because during infancy many of them are never breast-fed; they are bottle-fed with cows’ milk instead.

In awareness of that, now in our place various festivals of telling children stories are often held and many groups of children who care about stories start to be formed.

b. School

At school teachers not only teach but also educate pupils. By teaching, teachers only deliver knowledge. By educating, they form personalities. With the excuse of limited class hours and too dense curricula due to ‘school subject orders’ from various parties (like orders made by restaurant customers), character education becomes neglected. It used to be one subject thought at school but now there is no such subject anymore.

An effort we make is integrating character education into the Javanese language classes at elementary and junior high school. We are still trying to make such classes be taught at senior high school. It does not mean, however, that teaching such classes is without its own share of problems.

c. Community (Social Environment)

The community or social environment ought to have a big share in children’s character development. However, lately the social environment has been greatly polluted by the situation of an all-modern and free way of life.

Television, with its programs which follow one another from one morning to the next morning, could also take over children’s study time and erase their taste for stories told by their parents. Television, by often showing scenes of violence, brutality, and sex, has also played a part in changing children’s behavior. Children today no longer idolize the powerfull Gatotkaca character in the traditional wayang stories. Instead, they idolize the characters in cartoon films from abroad, for example.
Children’s absorption with their own activities and such objects, if not watched by parents, could bring about negative consequences like the children becoming brutal, destructive, fond of stealing, addicted to drugs, involved in gang fights, and so on.

An effort we make is establishing children’s study hours every night, requesting parents to be more attentive to their children who are not at home, and entreating the community to create a conducive social environment for children.

In the Javanese society there are many teachings concerning praiseworthy character. Studied more carefully, the teachings can be found to contain extraordinarily good values related to courtesies, ethics, manners, and also spirit givers. Unfortunately, many of them have now been forgotten by the Javanese people themselves. The young generation particularly have in general become ignorant of such teachings.

In the following I will present a number of traditional saying as examples. Besides containing loads of good meanings, usually the expressions are composed poetically.

(1) ‘Adigang-adigung-adiguna’ (showing off power-position-superiority): one who shows off his power, position, and superiority in order that others look up to him. This is a behavior filled with vanity. If not under control, someone like this tends to make use of his power at all times and misuse the power. Anyone, including officials, should avoid behaving this way.

(2) ‘Alon-alon waton kelakon’ (acting slowly as long as the target is reached): being careful in taking an action; what is important is that the result is not disappointing. Care must be taken in confronting a problem. Do not be impulsive in making a crucial decision. If misinterpreted, it gives a negative meaning, that is, a slow and lazy behavior (‘just take it easy as long as something is achieved’).

(3) ‘Ana dina ana upa’ (when there is still a day, there is still rice): this saying teaches us to believe in God, meaning that God, who creates days, would
surely give us what will continue our life day by day. Certainly we must have faith and make efforts. If misinterpreted, the meaning becomes negative, that is, even if one does not do any work, as long as there is still a day coming, God will surely give you what you need to live. The misinterpretation could have brought the Planned Parenthood Program to a failure in Java when the expression was interpreted as ‘no need to join the program because when there is still a day, there will surely be something useful for one’s life coming with it and every child born will itself bring with it what is needed to live on.

(4) ‘Becik ketitik ala ketara’ (what is good is seen and what is bad is obvious): a teaching to be honest because one who is good and honest will in time be seen. On the contrary, one who hides something bad will in time be revealed or discovered.

(5) ‘Bobot-bibit-bebet’ (wealth-family-social level): the elderly in Java always advice their children to consider these three things in finding a mate. ‘Bobot’ is the standard implying that the person to be chosen should possess some wealth, position, and rank. ‘Bibit’ is the standard implying that the person should come from a good family. ‘Bebet’ is the standard implying that the person should have a good social level. All three are the primary requirements while love is secondary. In the view of the modern Javanese, one of the three is enough. And for young people nowadays, ‘love’ is the primary requirement and those three can be pushed aside.

(6) ‘Cakra manggilingan’ (turning wheel): the turning wheel simbolizes man’s course in life. The process of man’s life always turns alternately. The turn causes a part at the top to be sometimes at the bottom and a part at the bottom will at certain times be at the top and so on. This saying teaches us not to be too proud when in happiness or having an advantage. Conversely, one need not feel inferior when in grief or want.

(7) ‘Mulat sarira hangrasa wani’ (feel brave when seeing oneself; dare to see oneself): this saying teaches one to be willing to be introspective and to have the courage to be corrected in order to know when one has made a
mistake in a process of self-improvement. This saying intends to advice
and encourage one to be honest and open to the criticism towards one.

(8) ‘*Narima ing pandum*’ (accepting one’s share): this is a teaching that God
has decided anything in man’s life. God has decided every man’s share
and every man’s fate. This ‘accepting’ attitude makes even the poorest can
feel happy because happiness does not come from material things but from
something far deeper. The accepting attitude means being able to calmly
accept anything from without, whether it is wealth, social position,
fortune, or misfortune.

(9) ‘*Tut wuri handayani*’ (following behind but giving good influence): good
parents or teachers should let children or pupils develop according to their
nature but they should direct them to what are good in order that they
reach their goals. In order words, in bringing up children parents should
pay careful attention to the children’s talents and interests. In its complete
form, this saying actually goes ‘*ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya
mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani*’, which means in front giving
examples, in the midst building up a will, and in the back giving a good
influence.

(10) ‘*Wani ngalah luhur wekasane*’ (daring to give in, lofty in the end;
daring to give in end with victory): this saying teaches that ‘giving in’ is
not the same as ‘being defeated’. In certain cases we had better give in
because in the end we will be superior. This teaching also implants good
color, modesty, and so on. Anyone confronted with a problem should
press down emotion as deeply as possible in order no quarrel occurs. This
teaching is opposition with young people’s spirit in solving problems
emotionally, or, as it is said, ‘hit first, talk later’.

Only ten saying are taken as examples here. On the whole there are about one
hundred sayings teaching various values concerning life and how to live to the
Javanese society.
Whether one likes it or not, the era globalization has eventually come to Indonesia or Java particularly. Its presence certainly brings along important ideas, sciences, cultural values, life norms, and so on, both those positive and those negative in value. We do not take anything negative, we accept anything positive, and then we let anything positive and local values which are also positive meet in a complementary mechanism.

The thinking pattern of the Javanese society indicates that certain things are usually expressed by means of sayings (or proverbs). The traditional saying possessed by the Javanese society have been found to contain pieces of advice, massages, hopes, and also doubts. These sayings will at least function as a projection system, an ordering system, and a means of education.

Our task is now to make efforts in order that the traditional sayings loaded with values as above are again understood and absorbed by the young generation. If they can understand and put them into practice, the Javanese young generation will in turn become a young generation deserving to be held up as example. In the same way, our traditional sayings will be able to be preserved.

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Bibliography


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