

“Seren Taun” between hegemony and culture industry

Reading a Sundanese ritual of harvest in Cigugur, West Java

LILAWATI KURNIA

ABSTRACT¹

Seren Taun is a ritual ceremony and celebration, which is practiced in West Java by the Sundanese. It is similar to Thanksgiving in many countries. The village Cigugur, located 3 km west of Kuningan, is the focus of the paper, because the Seren Taun celebration there has been a major event and received a lot of attention from the media, government, and scholars. Many non-Javanese traditional celebrations were repressed during the Suharto era and traditional beliefs were either also repressed or co-opted into one of the five official religions. During the post-Suharto era, the spirit of reformation has brought diversity of more than 300 ethnic groups onto the surface. With the aim to preserve and maintain the tradition of Seren Taun, but as well as to preserve the identity and collective memory of the community, Djatikusumah, chairman of PACKU, has in these recent years developed several policies, concerning traditional art performances, buildings/sites used for ceremonies, and the batik motives that were taken from woodcarvings in the Paseban hall. This paper will explore the intersection between the role of Djatikusumah as an agency and the culture industry he invented.

KEYWORDS

Seren Taun, Djatikusumah, hegemony, cultural tradition, negotiation.

¹ This paper is based on a three years research (2007-2009) on Seren Taun, which is subsidized by DIKTI (Ministry of Education). The research is multidisciplinary, whereas the members include an archaeologist, a philologist, a historian, a linguist and an expert in the field of cultural studies. The research team has visited Cigugur several times to interview their main references, these include Djatikusumah, his son and daughter, the people of Cigugur, and regional officers of Kuningan. Photos in this paper were made during the research by the author.

LILAWATI KURNIA teaches literature and cultural studies at the Graduate Program of the Literature Department, Faculty of Humanities University of Indonesia. She took her MA at the Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel, Germany. In 2000 she took her PhD in literature from the Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia. Lilawati Kurnia may be contacted at: lilawati@hotmail.com.

INTRODUCTION

Celebrating gratitude upon the lavish harvest of earth's resources, known as Seren Taun,² this festivity is held every year by the people of the village Cigugur, Kuningan, West Java. As like any other traditions in almost every agrarian ethnic group, the harvest season is always something everyone longs for and is seen as a result of the collaboration of trust and hard work. Sowing, planting, and maintaining the crops, represent what the major staple food of the community is. Seren Taun, which has been ingrained within the Sundanese community, was interdicted in the Dutch colonial era, because it was perceived as a potential anti-colonial movement. In contrary to this widespread contention, one could find an expression of culture in everyday life as opposed to culture in art and education. To the aforementioned effect, the research subjects of this paper are the people of the village of Cigugur, Kuningan, who proclaim to believe and practice PACKU (Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang 'the Association of Traditional Sundanese Beliefs'). The research focuses on the ceremony called Seren Taun, the most important celebration for the adherents of Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang. Although other Sundanese communities (such as in Sukabumi and Bogor) are also carrying out the cultural and traditional practices of those by the people of Cigugur, the well-known Seren Taun celebration is exclusive to the people of Cigugur, Kuningan.³ Seren Taun is a form of attempt of this Sundanese community, to uphold and maintain the Sundanese culture as their identity and trait; these are people who follow the Sunda Wiwitan tradition.⁴

This paper does not discuss Seren Taun from the perspectives of oral traditions, anthropology nor history, but it shows how the ritual serves as a means for the Sunda Wiwitan belief to survive and negotiate with the State through its course of history. The paper will focus on the role of the leaders of the Sunda Wiwitan belief in preserving the belief by positioning the ritual as a cultural heritage. The paper is informed by Hall's notion of culture as a site for intervention and change (Hall 1997), and the Gramscian role of intellectual in negotiation with the hegemonic forces (Gramsci 1971).

² *Seren* means to give or present, whereas *Taun* means a year, which is comprised of 12 months. Seren Taun is a ceremonial festival of rice harvest and other types of harvest. This ceremony is not documented in the manuscripts of ancient Sundanese culture, and is an agrarian community's reminiscent of gratitude towards the plentiful harvests. The rituals and prayers are directed to a female deity named Sanghiyang Pwahaci. The name Pwahaci can be interpreted as a source or origin (in Sundanese, *aci* means core or base).

³ This celebration has been relived again by Djatikusumah and his adherents after the Suharto regime came to an end. Due to the efforts made by Djatikusumah and the initiatives of some NGOs, Seren Taun has been covered by national and international media and since then, many other Sundanese groups started to celebrate Seren Taun too.

⁴ Wiwitan Sunda or Sunda Wiwitan is the traditional belief of the indigenous people of West-Java, the Sundanese.

KUNINGAN AS THE HOME OF SUNDA WIWITAN BELIEF

Shown below is a political map of West Java, which depicts divisions of administrative regions. The Kuningan regency is adjacent to Cirebon and Majalengka. Due to its location at the borders of West Java and Central Java (Figure 1), the region is greatly affected by both the Javanese and Sundanese culture; hence, the areas own a variety of the Sundanese dialect called Wewengkon Sundanese one of Sundanese dialects.

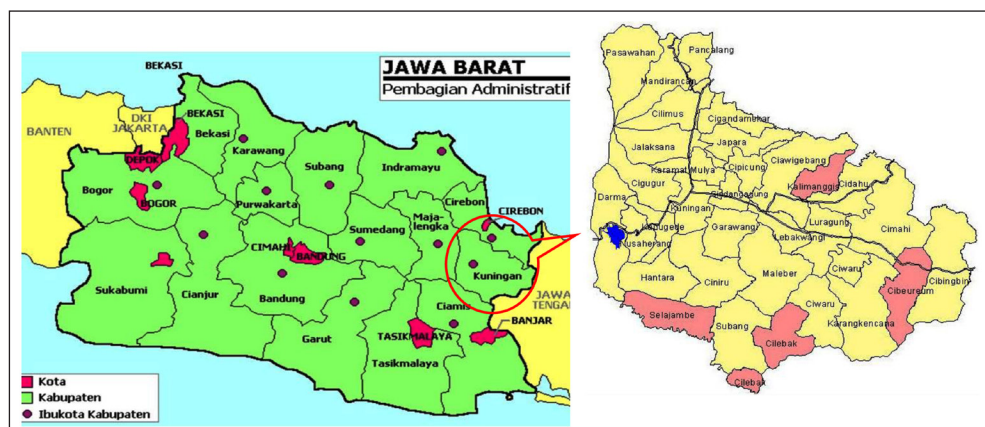


Figure 1. Map of the Province of West Java and the Kuningan Regency.⁵

The Sundanese dialect is used in Kuningan, but varies in terms of lexicons and articulations. Articulations and word choices can easily become an indication of a person's origin. The usage of Sundanese itself in the Seren Taun festivity is intriguing. The ceremony starts with the singing or reading of *rajah*⁶ to pray for safety as a cue for opening or closing a traditional ritual. According to Djatikusumah, the Sundanese dialect, which is used in *rajah*, is on a different level of standard. There has been prior research on Sundanese dialects, conducted by Ayatrohaedi (1985), Ayip Rosidi et al. (2000), and Edi Ekadjati (1984). As a region located at borders, Kuningan inevitably is a multicultural community with pluralistic cultural values.

⁵ Sources for West Java <https://rossrightangle.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/west-java-map.jpg>; for Kuningan Regency http://bumikuningan.blogdetik.com/files/2010/01/peta_kuningan1.jpg

⁶ *Rajah* is a type of mystical chant, which is used before a *Pantun* performance (in Sundanese culture, *Pantun* is a narrative show which is accompanied by *kecapi* - a string-plucked music instrument). The chant is an appeal to their deity, hoping for health and prosperity of the performers. In *rajah*, one can recognize the names of well-known Sundanese ancestors.



Figure 2. Paseban hall.

The Paseban hall⁷ is the pivot, where the Seren Taun ceremony is held every year. The photograph in Figure 2 was taken after the renovations in 2008-2009, which were partly financed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This hall was almost destroyed by time and climate. During the renovations, evidences or artefacts have been found, such as old coins in bundles of 3, 5 and 1, hence the name Tri Panca Tunggal.⁸ It is evident that the grandfather of Djatikusumah, has built the hall by using traditional ceremonies and offering to the Gods. Inside the hall, one can still find the woodcarvings on the pillars and roofs, which were made during the construction of the hall, and bear the philosophical ways of life of the Sundanese. These woodcarvings, which consist of flower motives and other kin, have meanings that only Djatikusumah can explain. Fortunately, Djatikusumah and his family, the owners of the hall, had them written down by now with the help of experts and activists, who wanted to preserve the uniqueness and the spirit of the Seren Taun ceremony as well. Not only local Sundanese people celebrate Seren Taun in Cigugur, but it is also attended by Sundanese who still hold firmly of the Sunda Wiwitan belief, among others such as the Baduy people from Kenekes - Banten, Indramayu Dayak people and the Sundanese from Sumedang.

SEREN TAUN; THE HARVEST FESTIVAL IN CIGUGUR, KUNINGAN

The ceremony of Seren Taun is not only celebrated and conducted in the Paseban hall, but also in a Catholic church, which is located only 500 meters away from the Paseban hall, and was built together with a hospital by Catholic

⁷ According to Djatikusumah, his grandfather has built the Paseban Hall in 1860. The hall became cultural heritage of the regency Kuningan in 1976 with the decree from the Director General of Archeology and History.

⁸ The number three refers to the emotions and feelings to the completeness of a human being, five are our senses, and one is oneness of creativity, taste, and work.

missionaries. The people of Cigugur and the surrounding areas have accepted pluralism as a way of life. They do not have religious conflicts, despite the many religions being practiced there. One can also find families, who embrace more than two religions, practiced by the parents, sons, or daughters. The parents do not force their children to have the same religion as they do. The uniqueness of this pluralism is worth to be spread among other indigenous groups in Indonesia. During a mass in the Catholic Church in Cisantana, Kuningan (Figure 3), on the night before the peak event of the Seren Taun ceremony takes place, one could see all the paddies, some of fruits, vegetables, and also fish, which are considered abundant in harvesting in that year, in front of the altar (Figure 4). The priest of the mass (in Sundanese) expressed gratitude to the Lord and to the so-called ancestors of the Sundanese, who taught them the way of life.



Figure 3. The mass of Seren Taun in the church in Cisantana.



Figure 4. The Altar of Sanghyang Pwahaci or Nyi Pohaci bears paddy, coconuts, other fruits and vegetables indigenous to the region such as cassava, and fishes.

FROM ADS (AGAMA DJAWA SUNDA) TO PACKU

Seren Taun in Kuningan has become a tradition in ADS by its founder Pangeran Sadewa Madrais Alibasa Kusuma Ningrat (further called as Madrais) at about the end of the nineteenth century. Prince Sadewa Madrais Alibasa Kusuma was a Muslim teacher who taught Islam with a lot of philosophical elements from his own cultural roots as a Sundanese. That is why the biography of Madrais cannot be found in history books as he was the founder of ADS and taught philosophies of life, which were seen of opposition in the Islam. For example, the philosophy of ADS refuses circumcision because it is forbidden to shed blood, because blood is a symbol of life of all living creatures.

It is said that the opinions as well as philosophies, which were spread by Madrais, originate from ancient beliefs in the Sundanese region, known as Sunda Wiwitan. The beliefs of Sunda Wiwitan can be traced back by three ancient manuscripts: *Sewaka Darma* (believed to have existed since the beginning of the eighteenth century), *Sanghyang Siksa Kanda Ng Karesian* (written in 1518), and *Amanat Galunggung* (originating from the Sundanese King Rakeyan Darmasiksa 1175-1197).⁹ Generally inferred, these three manuscripts are about the teachings of life of ancient Sundanese people, mixed with the philosophies of Hinduism/Buddhism. The role of traditions as well as the celebration of Seren Taun can neither be found in these three ancient manuscripts, but can instead be drawn based on oral traditions in the Sundanese region, that is the cult of the Goddess Pohaci (or Pwahaci). Sanghyang Pohaci or Nyi Pohaci¹⁰ is believed to be very meritorious due to her action of making the earth lush and teaching the people how to farm, especially how to cultivate paddies, as it is a staple food of the Indonesians. The highlight of every Seren Taun procession is a dance symbolizing the glory of Nyi Pohaci (Figure 5).

⁹ The three manuscripts (pre-Islam) are kept in the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, each given numeric codes as follows: *Sewaka Darma* in Ancient Sundanese (*Kropak* 408) and in Ancient Javanese (BR. 638) (Rosidi et al. 2000: 591); *Sanghyang Siksa Kanda Ng Karesian* written in Ancient Sundanese (*Kropak* 630) (Rosidi et al. 2000: 572); and *Amanat Galunggung* written in Ancient Sundanese (*Kropak* 632) (Rosidi et al. 2000: 44).

¹⁰ Oral references (pre-Islam), which have already been written down, such as Cariyos Suwargaloka and Wawacan Pohaci Dangdayan, are telling about a Goddess, who sacrificed herself of being burried. Her body subsequently turned into vegetation, which became utile for humans. There is also *Carita Pantun*, the word *carita* means 'story', whereas *pantun* means 'rhyme'.



Figure 5. Dancers carry paddies and other crops.

Meanwhile, Madrais founded an Islamic boarding school to proselyte his teachings. Unfortunately, his teachings were not acknowledged by *Kiai* (Moslem religious leader), he even was excluded by the other Muslim teachers and eventually Madrais was forced to exile. This dispute was long awaited by the Dutch East Indies and which used it in order to arrest and accuse him of spreading occult Islamic teachings and provocative speeches. According to Djatikusumah, Madrais' grandchild, the arrest was also caused by Madrais' activities which influenced the spirit of the people to cherish their own culture and reject any foreign culture. The Dutch East Indies saw this as a threat, because a revolt towards their authority and power could have occurred. The government of the Dutch East Indies however, used the conflict with other Moslem leaders as a reason to arrest and banish him to Ternate (the exact date of Madrais' banishment is difficult to define from the interview with Djatikusumah, though approximated in 1908), who then returned in 1920 as a farmer. Nevertheless, Madrais did not lose sight of his devotees; instead, they together climbed up the active volcano of Mount Cereme to pacify it. Madrais never went back to town after this incident, but lived at the foot of the mountain until he passed away in 1939. Madrais' son Pangeran Tejabuana Alibasa carried on his teaching until ADS was forbidden in 1964 and disbanded by the government of the Orde Baru (New Order), causing Tejabuana to embrace Catholicism.¹¹

Tejabuana was exiled by the Muslims in Cigugur, because his ADS teachings were considered fragments of other religion and considered non-Islamic. That is why he decided to convert into Catholicism. That is precisely the reason why Cigugur is unique, because there are no restrictions in having

¹¹ It was an obligation during the Suharto era to embrace a religion, corresponded to the Pancasila ideology, which states to have one true God. Only five religions are legitimately recognized: The Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

a specific religion despite the majority of Muslims in this region. Unlike the dominant Islamic tendency in West Java, there is more relaxed flexibility in practising religion in Cigugur. The grandson of Madrais, Pangeran Djatikusumah, who is the main reference of this research, quickly evolved the tradition of Seren Taun in 1999 after the Reformation. With a democratic openness in the reformation era, Djatikusumah had the chance to spread the ADS philosophy widely. He even succeeded in convincing the local people to become an ADS follower again.

Djatikusumah is fully aware that the celebration of Seren Taun is one of the elements of the Sunda Wiwitan belief, and that it will not get consent from authorities because it is not counted as one of the five religions, which are legitimately recognized by the New Order. Relying on the first principle in the Pancasila, during the Suharto government all religion had to be monotheistic, everything else was not allowed. The New Order five religion policy was adopted contrary to the fact that there are a variety of regional beliefs throughout Indonesia that are entrenched in their ancestors' traditions which distinctively embody a religious system in these regions. The invasive domination of the New Order government has led to an "extinction" of local traditions, causing the local people to become an adherent of any of the five official religions.¹² With the acknowledgement of only five religions, traditional beliefs had no chances to develop, among other the ADS. This led to the disappearance of the local beliefs and cultures one by one, because they were not practiced anymore. That is why many local beliefs and cultures, such as Seren Tahun, slowly eroded. This is why Djatikusumah initiated the establishment of PACKU in June 1980 to keep Seren Taun alive. Within PACKU, he made some well-thought strategies in keeping the Sunda Wiwitan adherents away from government infringements concerning regulations of the five official religions.

Djatikusumah saw a loophole within government regulations regarding the official religions; there were no interdictions towards local cultural practices. Moreover, some regulations seem ambiguous; on one hand clearly outlining the five legitimately recognized religions, on the other hand indicating a variety of indigenous cultures, which are carried high as Indonesia's cultural richness. Based on these policies, Djatikusumah has founded PACKU, allowing Sundanese cultural practices, such as Seren Taun, to take place, and which in addition has gotten support from the central government in renovating the Paseban hall. Through the celebration of Seren Taun, Djatikusumah has spread the Sunda Wiwitan philosophy by granting meanings to dances, Sundanese ballads and other rites. In addition, he also created batik motives, which were given meanings based on the Sunda Wiwitan philosophy. This all has become a lucrative business for Djatikusumah and his family. Thus, Djatikusumah

¹² In 1978, President Suharto issued the presidential decree no. 1470 which stated the acknowledgment of the official five religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. During the fourth presidency (after the 1998 reformation) of Abdurrahman Wahid, Confucianism was added as an official religion. This was a step of pluralism of the President, who is also known as Gus Dur.

has reinvented Sundanese art and culture; moreover, he has cultivated it into a culture industry by selling art products in the village of Cigugur.

DJATIKUSUMAH AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

Diversity and distinctiveness are two attributes, which are well sustained in the region of Kuningan, because one can find many unique traits exclusive to the creativity of the inhabitants of the area. The manner and method of organizing the Seren Taun ritual and festival, is a tradition, but as well a creation of Djatikusumah, the upholder of the Sundanese beliefs and the cultural leader of Cigugur and Kuningan. The creativity shown by Djatikusumah is a new variety of cultural creation that is embedded inside Seren Taun's festivities. One depiction of a cultural product is the Buyung dance (a dance about getting water with a big jar), which is performed by young female dancers trained especially by Djatikusumah himself accompanied by his wife. Another dance of Djatikusumah's creation is the Nyi Pohaci dance, which symbolizes the sacredness of Nyi Pohaci, and which is performed by his eldest daughter. Djatikusumah and his wife (former *Sinden*, a female traditional singer, singing to *gamelan* music) also created different Sundanese ballads, which are accompanied by *gamelan* music during Seren Taun celebrations.

Next to dances, *gamelan* music, and ballads, Djatikusumah also created batik motives. Cigugur Batik, which started to gain recognition in 2009, is the creation of Djatikusumah and his wife. It is passed down to their children, grandchildren, and the people of Cigugur. The batik motives were taken from carvings on poles and porches/ vestibules, which were then patented as Batik Paseban Cigugur (Figure 6).¹³ In this context, the rituals and festivals can be considered as "invented tradition" as stated by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.¹⁴ Djatikusumah thereby did not just become an agency, which rejected the intervention and hegemony of the government, but he also created a culture industry for his family and the local people. Batik Paseban Cigugur has become a hallmark of Cigugur and at the same time the yield of his family and people.

¹³ Some of the meanings that can be found in the batik motives of Cigugur are:

1. *Adu Manis* means the unity of two beings within a harmonious marriage. This Batik is worn in wedding ceremonies.
2. *Oyod Mingmang* is an array of roots, which are perceived as strength and understood as holistic. It symbolizes coalescence and unity.
3. *Rereng Pwah Aci* is a depiction of young Sundanese females who bear crucial and important roles in the lives of the community.
4. *Geger Sunten* means to resist external temptations and to do introspection.

¹⁴ "Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past [...]. However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992: 1).



Figure 6. Some examples of Cigugur Batik.

Djatikusumah has created several attractions for a week regarding the Seren Taun festival, which were used as tourism objects by the village of Cigugur, but as well as by the local government of Kuningan, who added the celebrations of Seren Taun as a distinctive cultural part of Kuningan, into their official website. Thus, the Seren Taun celebrations have been officially accepted by the local as well as by the central government, as part of the Sundanese culture in the village of Cigugur and in addition, it has drawn the attention of authorities.

The local as well as the central government started to pay attention towards the celebrations of Seren Taun in Cigugur, especially after the celebration attracted national as well international media attention and was attended by guests from different countries. The reconciliation attempt came up from the side of the central government and was facilitated by the local district government of Kuningan through the Head of Kuningan regency Aang Suganda. He was the first government official who wanted and has attended Seren Taun for over four years since he was elected. The Director General of the Culture and Tourism Ministry Harry Untoro Drajat attended Seren Taun too in 2008. These officials witnessed the celebrations of Seren Taun as symbol of Pluralism, which has edified Sunda Wiwitan and the position of Djatikusumah as its customary elder (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The Officials (Aang Suganda in red Batik, Untoro Drajat, and Djatikusumah - from left to right).

DISCUSSION

When one speaks of culture, one will ultimately question its definition. What is (or what is not) culture? The word culture has been perceived as objects or thoughts created or produced by humans. However, culture cannot be separated from its regulations, as Hall puts it, "question of culture [...] are absolutely deadly political questions" (Hall 1997: 290).

According to Hall, culture is not only something that can be appreciated or learnt, but it is a critical site for social activities and interventions, and also a place where power relations are created and disputed. In conjunction with the aforementioned, this paper shows that there is a deeper meaning of the Seren Taun celebration in Cigugur, than just a harvest festival itself. This can be shown by the history of cultural practices of Sunda Wiwitan, which was initiated by Madrais but received discriminatory treatment in the Dutch colonial era, as well as in the new order era. After the reformation, Djatikusumah saw a possibility to cultivate the celebration of Seren Taun into a Sundanese tradition and culture in Cigugur.

The celebration made Djatikusumah, his family and the people of Cigugur and its surrounding areas, politically recognized by the local government of Kuningan as part of Kuningan's tradition and culture, causing the discriminatory treatment they have gotten to end. Djatikusumah was indirectly edifying his position as the customary elder and simultaneously cultivating the Sunda Wiwitan culture. He therefore became an agency, who was in opposition to the government (in terms of the statute of five legitimately recognized religions by the state), despite never confronting them formally. He let the celebration of Seren Taun instead become a festival, which would be attended by guests from different countries and catch media attention. This led to a change of perspective of the local government of Kuningan, who at

first did not recognize the existence of Djatikusumah, but then rendered Seren Taun into a cultural activity, which now is carried with pride.

Paseban, was build in 1840 as the centre of Seren Taun and had the right as a cultural heritage up until its renovations, which was fully supported by the Director General of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This all has made the position of Djatikusumah and his family culturally as well as politically more foursquare, and socioeconomically, fairly well.

Djatikusumah and his family have inherited this position and also have named themselves as sole heirs of many cultural industries around the Paseban such as the festival of Seren Taun. The Buyung dance is performed at the peak of this festival, which was invented by Djatikusumah's wife. The same goes to Paseban batik, which is created or designed by Djatikusumah and is now spread in Cigugur through batik trainings to the people in Cigugur. So far, Djatikusumah has created 250 motives, nine of them have been registered as intellectual property. The invention of dances, ceremonies, and batik are invented traditions, which not only serve as collective memory but also as a cultural bargaining power against the hegemonic power from the government and the main religions in Indonesia. This is also caused by the Seren Taun festival, which is an annual meeting point for Sundanese from all regions. During the prayer ceremony, all religions and beliefs are invited and are given the opportunity to contribute prayers to everyone. By preserving the cultural collective memory of their ancestor with the practice of beliefs and cultural heritage, the family of Djatikusumah can also be seen as locus genius, allowing Djatikusumah as an agency to revive the Sunda Wiwitan beliefs in the celebrations of Seren Taun, leading that this harvest festival undergoes a *renaissance* among Sundanese people in Cigugur and its surrounding areas. In addition, Djatikusumah as a creator of different cultural products has generated a culture industry for his family, as well as for the local people, causing social and economical stability.

Furthermore, Djatikusumah also renewed the teachings, which were spread by his grandfather, by setting up regulations about the Seren Taun celebration, where different delegation would participate by representing the tradition of indigenous people like the so-called Baduy¹⁵ people from Kenekes, or the Sundanese from Sumedang with their music and dance *Tarawangsa*.¹⁶ The people of Kenekes are a very special indigenous group, who until now preserved their territory and their nature by refusing any intervention from the government (for example, they do not participate in the election) and refuse the use of technology. They live almost exactly like their ancestors in their villages.

The policies, towards traditional beliefs, can be seen as an extension of

¹⁵ The name Baduy was given by the Dutch colonial government who has never been able to bring the people of Kenekes out of their villages into the modern time. This name is a degradation because it represents people who are underdeveloped and uncivilized.

¹⁶ *Tarawangsa* is played with a *kecapi* with two strings (resembles a zither), other common *kecapi* and accompanied by two or more girl dancers, who dance to the music. It is considered a sacred tradition to the people of Sumedang.

colonial power, through Christianity hegemony which cooped traditional beliefs instead of supporting it on its own. Sunda Wiwitan was forbidden during the Suharto regime, causing the father of Djatikusumah, Tedjabuana, to convert to Catholicism. It is gripping to see that Tedjabuana has chosen Catholicism over the Islam, as a strategy to survive. Since the Seren Taun celebration has attracted national as well as international media attention, and later received the acknowledgment of the local and central government, the status of Madrais' descendants was not seen as marginal anymore; in fact, they became the elders of the community and were considered as role models among those who embraced Sunda Wiwitan.

This all came into effect because Djatikusumah succeeded in breaking the policies by compelling strategies, which may be also referred as soft power;¹⁷ that is to disseminate the festival of Seren Taun, with the help of other Sundanese indigenous people. The ways Djatikusumah has used to revive Sunda Wiwitan, can in my opinion be seen as soft power. He did not execute it with insistence but rather by making the culture as much appealing and its philosophy universal as possible (for example, he invited representatives of all official religions to attend the highlight of Seren Taun), thus catching interest as well as gaining supporters.

This kind of Sundanese cultural practice almost disappeared, because it has gone through a lot of difficulties caused by prohibitions of the previous government or marginalization by majoritarian religious groups. Thanks to Djatikusumah's efforts this cultural heritage has been maintained and is rapidly developing. Not only is this culture attractive for the Sundanese, but Seren Taun has also received much attention from different kinds of national and international NGOs, which support this Sundanese believe. Additionally, Sundanese culture enthusiasts who are interested in its preservation, also attend this festivity. Despite not being Sundanese themselves they attend to witness and participate, and are thankful that this kind of Sundanese cultural festivity still exists. Djatikusumah also cleverly revived PACKU as a Sunda Wiwitan culture site, causing Sunda Wiwitan not being seen as a religion anymore, which potentially contradict other official religions. Sunda Wiwitan has become a traditional cultural form worth preserving.

Other than that, Djatikusumah also gathered different tribes from the Sundanese region, which also embraced the Sunda Wiwitan, to celebrate Seren Taun together. By way of the congregation of the marginalized groups after the New Order era, Djatikusumah threw in an oppositional statement against the government and the statute of the five legitimate religions. Therefore, this can be seen as a way of conquest or domination either from the government apparatus or from the mainstream religions. In dealing with the government's

¹⁷ Soft power is a term, which was first coined by Joseph Nye (2005). It describes the phenomenon, which occurs when a nation's power is not applied with coercion but rather through a culture. By this means, people voluntarily revere that culture. For that matter, this has been equated to the phenomenon of the globetrotting Japanese popular culture, a culture people like and adore.

hegemony and the power of the mainstream religions, Djatikusumah came to a solution that can be accepted by all parties at one hand, and on the other hand fortifies Paseban's position and role as a place to proliferate Sunda Wiwitan creed. Seren Taun and its celebration in Cigugur is a riveting case, which demonstrates how nation's process of hegemony can be halted by cultural negotiation.

REFERENCES

- Ayatrohaedi. 1985. *Bahasa Sunda di daerah Cirebon*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka. [Seri ILDEP.]
- Ekadjati (ed.). 1984. *Masyarakat Sunda dan kebudayaannya*. Jakarta : Girimukti Pasaka.
- Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Hall, Stuart. 1997. "Subject in history; Making diasporic identities", in: Wahneema Lubiano (ed.), *The house that race built*, pp. 289–299. New York: Pantheon.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds). 1992. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [First edition 1983.]
- Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2005. *Soft power; The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affair.
- Rosidi et al. 2000. *Ensiklopedi Sunda. Alam, manusia, dan budaya, termasuk budaya Cirebon dan Betawi*. Jakarta: The Toyota Foundation, Tokyo dan Yayasan Kebudayaan Rancage.

Interviews:

- Interview with Djatikusuma, Cigugur, August 2007 and September 2008.
- Interview with Aang Hamid Suganda (Regent of Kuningan), Kuningan, August 2007.
- Interview with Yayan Sofyan (Deputy of Culture and Tourism Kuningan District), Kuningan, August 2007 .
- Interview with Asep Budi Setiawan (Head of Division of Culture and Tourism Kuningan District), Kuningan, August 2007.