

A Shift in The Meaning of Deer Head Sculpture in Javanese House Interior

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Abstract *Kejawen* community of Java, syncretism from Java, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam possess many kinds decoration in their houses (Javanese houses). One of them is deer head sculpture. Even though it is an imported culture, the deer head sculpture can be easily accepted by the Javanese people because references regarding deer story have been found since the old time. Even though related to deer are quite common, there has not been any research on the shift in the meaning of deer in the context of Javanese culture. The method used in this study is qualitative research with the paradigm interpretation. The results of the analysis found that the deer head sculpture, which was originally a preserved and displayed raven at home as a symbol of prestige, has a connection with Hindu culture, Majapahit culture, Mataram dynasty royal regalia, and Javanese (commoner) Javanese culture. In the context of today's modern culture, deer head sculptures are displayed in today's interiors to present a traditional atmosphere and for the sake of nostalgia

Keywords meaning, deer head sculpture, Javanese house

1. Introduction

In ancient time, male deer head sculptures were very popular and adorned interior design in many houses of distinguished people in the cities of Java, Dutch heritage houses, and the interior of Javanese houses in the countryside. Displaying the deer head sculpture has become a habit in Javanese society, and almost all levels of society at that time displayed it in the interior of their homes, at least in a very simple form. Displaying a deer head sculpture equipped with horns is not only found in Java. Deer head sculpture is also found in many other traditional houses such as Betawi houses, Balinese houses, in Southeast Asia and even in Europe.

The current generation perceives this art as it is and in general does not have the curiosity about the meaning behind the installation of this deer head sculpture. This study focused on the shift in the meaning of deer head sculptures from mere decorations, as presumed today, to the actual concept of the deer itself, which has fused into the lives of Javanese people, especially in the *Kejawen* community.

At present, deer head sculptures not only decorate Javanese houses, or modern homes owned by Javanese as a part of past memories, but this sculpture is also displayed in the interiors of other buildings for public interest. Many hotels and restaurants display deer head sculptures to present the

atmosphere of the past. This shows a shift in meaning related to the deer head sculpture art works.

2. Method

The locations of this study are several Javanese houses in the Surakarta city area, Central Java Province, Indonesia. This type of qualitative research is capable of capturing various qualitative information with careful and nuanced descriptions, which are more valuable than mere statements of numbers or frequencies in the form of numbers [1]. The research data were in the form of shifts in the meaning of deer head sculptures in the interior of a Javanese house. The paradigm interpretation analysis has a literal understanding, among others, of breaking things down into parts in order to comment or examine something as a whole [2]. Data analysis on the shift in meaning was conducted through interpretation. This is in line with Spradley's argument, that interpretation often represents a kind of refreshment of thought. Ideas can come from past reading, certain theoretical perspectives, and some comments expressed by informants [3].

3. Result and Discussion

The installation of deer head sculpture, usually a pair, on a wall of a Javanese house, is mostly found in the *gebyog*, a wall between *pringgitan* (a transition room from the front

main hall to inner part of the house) and *dalem* (inner main chamber), precisely on the left and right of the main entrance. Deer head sculptures are installed on the main *saka* (pillar) in *pendhapa* (main hall) or *dalem* (inner main chamber). The head of a male deer is also commonly displayed on a *patang aring* wall (interior in a Javanese house).

The material used to make a deer head sculpture is teak or jackfruit wood with the shapes starting from the neck to the head. In addition, some are made in the form of a complete deer, but the body is flat and only from the neck to the head which is in three dimensions. The horns are made of wood sculpture resembling original horns and some are original male deer horns that are mounted on deer head sculptures made of wood. The finishing commonly used is ocher paint, bronze, and some use gold tinsel for the *sunngingan* (coloring) for the head. In the past, deer head sculpture art works could show the social status of the homeowner. As explained by Hermanu, the larger and longer the size of the deer horns mounted on wooden deer head sculpture, the more charismatic the person who possessed it gets. Thus only distinguished and rich people possess quality deer head sculptures. Meanwhile, the commoners usually have deer head sculpture with a very simple form [4].

In the practice of installing deer head sculptures in the interior design of Javanese houses, there are those who install more than a pair, or exactly five pieces. The unique characteristic lies on the neck part of each deer head statue that is shaped like a shield. There are different writings found on the neck part, namely *tatag*, *teteg*, *titis*, *tetes* and *tutug*. This symbolizes the Javanese philosophy which means that if someone wants to succeed in his life, he must live according to the things mentioned above, with the explanation as follows:

Tatag: tanpa duwé uwas sumelang or to not be afraid.

Teteg: kukuh; ora obah-obah; panggah or to hold on one's principles.

Titis: trep pener panujune or to focus on a goal.

Tetes: nyata klakon kaya sing diaguhaké or to be able to make a wish come true

Tutug: tekan ing pungkasan or to finish and not to stop on the way of pursuing something.

The installation of the deer head is related to the pleasure of hunting, with a deer head preserved to be mounted on the wall. Related to the deer hunting, it was explained by Rafles as follows.

Many of Javanese people had long traveled abroad, where hunting was considered to be related to their needs.

The male deer are hunted, especially in the eastern and western regions of the island, by the descendants of the Balinese and Sundanese ethnics.

The Javanese, who live in the central part of the island, did not do such entertainment, nor did they know anything like that. The hunting as a whole is a chasing animal game on a horseback. In the eastern area hunted animals are killed by using spears. In the western area hunted animals are killed by using *klewang*, traditional sword. Hunting was done more regularly and methodically, and many residents, especially their leaders, were very eager to participate in it, using the best and most agile horses, involving hunting dogs [5].

Hunting for pleasure began with the establishment of cities that find something interesting outside the city, thus the activity was scheduled for fun. Meanwhile, these activities had been stopped in Europe and replaced with many establishments of zoos, so that people who want to see the beauty outside the city associated with animals can just come to the zoos. In Java, in the era of the Mataram kingdom and its heirs, hunting became a very interesting entertainment. Even scenes of killing animals such as tigers were carried out in the city square by involving many actors and spectators.

Javanese people have been familiar with references to deer. As in the context of Hindu teachings, deer was presented in the Ramayana story which mentions the golden deer. When Rama, Dewi Sita (husband and wife), and Laksmana (Rama's younger brother) were in the forest to serve a sentence of 14 years, the golden deer (*kidang kencana*), which was actually an incarnation of Marica the giant, was sent by Rahwana, the King of Alengka, to kidnap Dewi Sita to be his wife. Dewi Sita really liked the golden deer, so Rama and Laksmana chased the golden deer and tried to shoot it down with their bows. However, the golden deer was sent by Rahwana to lure and keep Rama and Laksmana away from Dewi Sita. When Sita was alone, Rahwana came and pretended to be a beggar who asked for food. When Sita gave her food, Rahwana grabbed her hand and then managed to kidnap her.

The deer head sculpture is also known in Bali and according to Van der Hoop's analysis, this sculpture was found in the Majapahit era. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that even in the Majapahit era the deer decoration was already well known.

The deer head sculpture "*Menjangan Seluang Maspait*" was displayed on the front of the sacred houses for the Majapahit god in the "*pura desa*," village temples of Singaraja, Bali. After the fall of Majapahit, some of the Hindu-Javanese who did not want to convert to Islam fled to Bali. The memory of the event is kept alive by these temples, which are always decorated with deer ornaments [6].

Sculptures in the shape of deer are also found in the Surakarta Palace and Yogyakarta Palace. The sculpture is one of the objects that functions as regalia, namely heirlooms made of gold symbolizing the character of the Sultan leading the sultanate and its people. Deer or *dhalang* symbolizes ingenuity and skills. Some regalia can be explained as follows.

1. *Banyak* (swans), a symbol of honesty and vigilant.
2. *Dhalang* (deer), a symbol of ingenuity and skill.
3. *Sawung* (rooster), a symbol of virility and responsibility.
4. *Galing* (peacock), a symbol of grandeur and beauty.
5. *Hardawalika* (golden dragon), symbol of strength.
6. *And others*.

Based on the description above, although at that time displaying a deer head sculpture was a trend and could be found everywhere, which was not limited to Java but in Asia and even Europe, the art works could be accepted by the Javanese people. This is because there have been a considerable number of references about deer in the minds of the Javanese people, thus the deer head sculpture originating from an outside culture can be considered as their own.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the Javanese people have known references related to deer since the days of the ancient Mataram kingdom, precisely on the Prambanan temple reliefs which represents the Ramayana story. Majapahit passed down the culture of deer sculpture to Balinese society for temple decoration. In the context of the Javanese kingdom in Surakarta, especially in the Kasunanan palace, deer is regalia that symbolize ingenuity and skill. At present, the deer head statue has returned to its function as an ornament with its meaning that represents value to the past memories.

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