

# Javanese Culture

Koentjaraningrat



Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
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# Javanese Culture

*The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies was established as an autonomous organization in May 1968. It is a regional research centre for scholars and other specialists concerned with modern Southeast Asia, particularly the multi-faceted problems of stability and security, economic development, and political and social change.*

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To my wife

## Preface

THIS book is a by-product of an annotated bibliography of Javanese culture, which is one of the annotated bibliographies on Indonesian peoples and cultures, a project of the Dutch-Indonesian cooperation for the Study of Indonesia. The project coordinator on the Dutch side is Professor H. G. Schulte Nordholt, anthropologist of the Free University of Amsterdam. I am his counterpart on the Indonesian side. In addition I am also a participant of the project and writer of the annotated bibliography on the Javanese.

After having read, reviewed, and annotated several hundred books and articles on Javanese culture, not much effort is indeed needed to assemble the pile of loose annotations on the ample elements and aspects of Javanese culture into an ethnographic whole. Into the description I have added and integrated my own experiences as participant of that culture, as well as data which I have compiled during my field work in two villages in South Central Java in the long dry season vacations of 1958 and 1959, and also data gathered during my research on variations of value orientation in Central and East Java in 1970.

In writing the book I have adopted R. Redfield's concept on the difference between the small and the great tradition in a culture, and have therefore arranged my Javanese material on social organization, the economic system and occupations in two chapters: one on the culture of the peasants in the village communities, and another one on the culture of the intelligentsia in civil servant occupations in the more urban environments. There is an extensive literature in Indonesian, Dutch, as well as in English on the first matter, but literature on the latter topic is much more limited.

Because there are no principal differences between the belief and ceremonial system of Javanese peasants and civil servants, I have abandoned the aforementioned distinction when I described Javanese religion. I have, however, followed C. Geertz's example, who has recognized more important and basic differences in Javanese religion, i.e., the distinction between a syncretistic Javanese religious system and another one based on more puritan Islamic doctrines.

I am grateful to my Dutch counterparts of the Project on Annotated Bibliography on Indonesian Peoples and Cultures, who have constantly supported and supplied me with a substantial part of the reading material. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, which has made it possible for me to work in its library for three months. I am also grateful to all the people who have made the publication of this book possible, especially to Professor Kernial Singh Sandhu, who has recommended it for publication, and to his staff, who has improved the English of the manuscript.

1 August 1979

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## Orthography

FOR the transcription of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Javanese names and words into Roman script, I have utilized the letters listed below for specific phoneme characteristics in those languages:

### *In Sanskrit words:*

s is used for स् , the apical spirant [s]

ṣ is used for ष , the retroflex spirant [ʂ]

sh is used for श , the laminal spirant [ʃ]

### *In Arabic words:*

s is used for س , the apical spirant [s]

sh is used for ص , the retroflex spirant [ʂ]

sy is used for ش , the laminal spirant [ʃ]

t is used for ت , the voiceless apical alveolar stop [t]

th is used for ط , the voiceless retroflex stop [ʈ]

ts is used for ث , the voiceless interdental stop [tʃ]

d is used for د , the voiced apical alveolar stop [d]

dh is used for ذ , the voiced retroflex stop [ɖ]

dz is used for ذ , the voiced interdental stop [dʒ]

c is used for ع , the glottal vocoid [ʔ]

### *In Javanese words:*

t is used for ꦠ , the voiceless apical dental stop [t]

th is used for ꦠꦺ , the voiceless apical alveolar stop [tʰ]

d is used for ꦢ , the voiceless apical dental stop [d]

dh is used for ꦢꦺ , the voiced apical alveolar stop [dʰ]

*Spelling*

1. Some words in this book have not been rendered in the more conventional manner because I have used *sh* for Arabic ص as in the word *shaum* ( ص م ). *Syarī'ah*, however, takes on *sy* ( ش ) instead of *sh* ( ص ).
2. The spelling of Indonesian/Javanese names follows the most current style preferred by the individual concerned but strict consistency has not been possible because of variation over a period of time.
3. Geographical place—names have been spelt following the current Indonesian spelling system. I have retained the spelling of Modjokuto which is a fictitious name invented by a group of MIT social scientists who made a study of a Javanese town called Pare.
4. In the Bibliography, names of Indonesian/Javanese authors as they appear on the original document have been used. Should there be variant styles of spelling, I have adopted the spelling used in the most recent published work of the author concerned.

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## Introduction

### 1. THE HOMELAND

THE homeland of the Javanese is Java, a moderate-sized island over 1 200 km. long and 500 km. wide in a straight line drawn between its extremities, and located about 7° south of the equator on the southern fringe of the Indonesian Archipelago. It accounts for only 7 per cent of the total land area of Indonesia.

The island is part of a very ancient geological mountain formation which extends southwards from the Himalayan and South-East Asian mountain systems, curving down in a southeasterly and easterly direction along the edges of the Sunda continental platform.

Java is highly volcanic and consists of an uninterrupted series of large extinct and active volcanoes, varying in height above sea-level from 1 500 m. to 3 500 m., with solfatara and fumarole fields, constantly producing lava flows and large quantities of ash. Next to this main range of volcanoes are various groups of smaller mountains and hills, extending in different directions, sometimes originating from the main volcano range.

Ranges of low, calcareous hills, often with flat tops extend along the north-eastern and southern shores of Java. At many places on the south coast, these hills become a series of rocky cliffs, dropping steeply into the Indian Ocean.

From the slopes of the mountains and hills, numerous rapid streams discharge andesitic volcanic material into the valleys of larger rivers, whose sandy and gravelly soils contain large reserves of nutrients required for cultivation, and a high water-holding capacity. Large rivers such as the Serayu of Central



Java, and the Solo and Brantas Rivers of East Java further deposit fertile volcanic material onto the low plains of deep alluvium along the south coast of Central Java and the northern coastal stretches of East Java.

The fertility of Java's soil, however, is also strongly affected by the climate. Situated between the two continents of Asia and Australia, the Indonesian Archipelago in general and Java in particular, have a climate dominated by the monsoon winds which blow from the Indian Ocean in one season and from the dry Australian continent in the other. From November to April, the south-west monsoon brings heavy rains, while from May to October the south-east monsoon brings the dry season to the islands. Too heavy a rainfall in excess of evaporation causes a speedy leaching of the soils. Fortunately Java's climate is neither too dry nor too wet. In addition to the monsoons, rainfall is also affected by topography and altitude. The rainfall is heavier on mountainous ranges and volcanic cones than on the plains, and heavier also on the slopes to the windward side than to the lee. Java's temperature is almost constant and varies only from the daily average of about 28 °C in the coastal plains to about 16 °C in the mountainous interior.

The Javanese people occupy only the central and eastern parts of the island of Java, as the western part (which is dominated by the Priangan Highlands) is the homeland of another ethnic and linguistic group, the Sundanese. The borderline between the Javanese and the Sundanese regions is demarcated by the Citandui and Cijulang Rivers to the south and the town of Indramayu to the north. Like the Javanese, the Sundanese also form a large ethnic group—in fact, the second largest in Indonesia, numbering approximately twenty million in 1971.

Most of Java is densely populated, and even the arid little island of Madura to the north-east of Java (which is the homeland of another ethnic and linguistic group, the Madurese) had over two million inhabitants in 1971. Thus Java, a crowded island, where 60 per cent of the total Indonesian population resides on only 7 per cent of the total land area of the nation, is the problem-ridden homeland of Javanese culture.