

Sengkalan Memet: A Chronogram Visualized By Javanese Through Many Stages of Symbolizations

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the process of symbolization of sengkalan memet made by Javanese as a visualized chronogram. It also became a work of art because of its presence as an artistic object. Sengkalan memet as a chronogram is not easy to read even its presence is not necessarily known to everyone but only certain people because it is quite complicated. The complexity is caused by its presence which is often only in the form of pictures without any texts (or sentences) whereas as a chronogram, the function is to "time writing". The research method is a descriptive qualitative with aesthetic, cultural and historical approaches. data obtained by literature studies. The results showed that sengkalan memet created by Javanese through many stages of symbolizing. This proves that Javanese society in their lives is always full of symbolize expressions that are also manifested in their material culture. That is why Javanese visualize their chronogram with no text while the others doesn't. This can enrich the discussion of Nusantara's aesthetics regarding creative process of making an art piece, especially Java.

Key Words: sengkalan memet, chronogram, Java, Aesthetic, symbol.

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini ialah untuk mengetahui proses penyimbolan sengkalan memet sebagai kronogram yang divisualisasikan. Sengkalan memet juga menjadi suatu karya seni karena kehadirannya yang artistik. Sengkalan memet sebagai kronogram tidak mudah dibaca bahkan kehadirannya belum tentu diketahui semua orang melainkan hanya orang tertentu saja karena cukup rumit. Kerumitan itu disebabkan oleh kehadirannya yang seringkali hanya berupa gambar tanpa tulisan padahal sebagai kronogram fungsinya ialah untuk penanda waktu di masanya. Metode penelitian menggunakan kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan estetika, budaya dan sejarah melalui pengumpulan data berupa literatur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sengkalan memet dibuat orang Jawa dengan beberapa kali tahap menyimbolkan. Hal ini membuktikan bahwa masyarakat jawa dalam kehidupannya selalu penuh dengan ungkapan yang juga termanifestasi dalam budaya materialnya. Itulah mengapa Jawa memvisualisasikan kronogramnya tanpa tulisan sedangkan yang lain tidak. Hal ini dapat memperkaya bahasan estetika nusantara mengenai proses kreasi dalam suatu penciptaan karya seni, khususnya Jawa.

Kata kunci: *sengkalan memet, kronogram, jawa, estetika, simbol.*

INTRODUCTION

Chronogram (derives from the Greek: *chronos* = time, *gramma* = letter) as a 'time writing' can be found in many regions around the world such as Greece, Roman, Czech Republic, Germany, India, and also Nusantara (the archipelago). Java as part of the Nusantara, made and developed the Chronogram. In fact, when in other regions the form of chronograms is in the form of writing, chronograms in Java are already in the form of images which are often present without any text and thus require special interpretation. Chronograms in the form of images in Java are called sengkalan memet (*memet* = means delicate, complicated in Javanese). In accordance with the chronogram function in general, Sengkalan memet is made to signify the atmosphere/ moment of its time but not directly write in a sentences like a chronogram in other areas but through images. The picture turned out to be a visualization of a sentence expression. Sengkalan memet is usually attached to, or merges with certain cultural artifacts, for example in the palace building or even the art artifact itself, e.g. temple's relief, Beber puppets and shadow puppets.

Examples of sengkalan memet which signifies the rise of Kraton Yogyakarta expresses as: *Dwi naga Rasa Tunggal* (in Javanese) which means two snake in the same feeling. The word *dwi* is a character that represents the number 2, *naga* represents the number 8, *rasa* represents the number 6, while *tunggal* represents the number 1. If arranged upside down it will read 1682 as a number of years, which is Javanese year (1682 A. J/ Anno Javanico = 1760 A.D). Then it illustrated as a sculpture of two dragon with tail that is united symmetrically. The other sengkalan memet can be found in Kraton Surakarta Hadiningrat to be more specific on the top of Panggung Sangga Buana building which is stated as *Naga Muluk Tinitihan janma* (flying dragon as a human vehicle). It is signifies that building establishment on 1708 A.J. The number 1 represents *janma*, 7 represents *tinitihan*, 0 represents *muluk*, and 8 represents *naga*. The sentence expressing Javanese hopefulness in their philosophy that humans will go to perfection (*kasampurnan*). That sentence represented by a sculpture showing a dragon driven by a human doing archery directing skyward.

The year number itself is a symbol, then so does the sentence made by words. The sentence is not describes what actually happening but states an meaningful expression. It seems that Javanese made sengkalan memet by symbolizing more than one step. And also the symbolism is philosophical. Sengkalan memet is interesting works of art that need to be further studied. Furthermore, the reversed year number on the Javanese's chronogram method is different from other regions. The uniqueness of sengkalan memet as a works of art in the form of chronogram whose presence is often not followed by writing sentences and how Javanese depicts a chronogram in the form of sengkalan memet whose creation process is full of symbols underlies this research.

METHOD

This research using qualitative method with a historical approach, cultural approach and aesthetic approach. Sengkalan as explained is a time writing of years related to history. The existence of Sengkalan in various art and artifacts of culture is inseparable from the history of its emergence and the form of cultural manifestations, and the history of the time of the traction is used as a marker of certain moments of its time. Sources of data on sengkalan memet in the form of images of various cultural artifacts such as temples, palaces and others come from libraries, both books, journals and online, which will be examined for symbolism. The technique of collecting data is literature study in order to obtain previous studies and also theories related to sengkalan. data of literature about sengkalan in this study were collected and then grouped. Data of

sengkalan memet from various types of art artifacts in Java were analyzed with Panofsky's iconographic theory (1955) which was associated with historical aspects and cultural aspects. Panofsky's iconography has stages namely pre-iconography, iconography, and iconology. The pre-iconographic stage in sengkalan memet is identifying the formalistic aspects which is its illustration of figure. Then, iconography is the stage of searching for meaning that already exists. The final stage, i.e. iconology, is done by interpreting the revealed meaning. The symbolism of number was analyzed with Saussure's signified - signifier.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussing about sengkalan certainly related to time. *Titimangsa* (in javanese)/ time used in Indonesia are influenced by foreign nations. The interaction of the Indonesian people with various foreign nations influenced the type of titimangsa used at each time (Agustina, 2017). titimangsa that has been used by Javanese people including titimangsa based on the year of Çaka, the Hijriyah year (Anno Hijrae = A.H), the Javanese year (Anno Javanico = A.J), and the Masehi year (Anno Domini = A.D).

Sengkalan first appeared known based on Javanese stories. Sangkala (sengkalan) or Jaka Sengkala was a son of a king from India who came to Java and later had the title of Empu Sengkala. He disseminated a variety of arts including knowledge about the calculation of the year which developed into two kinds namely the suryasengkala year: according to the earth circulates around the sun (sun in Javanese: *surya*) and the year candrasengkala: according the moon around the sun (moon in Javanese: *candra*) (Bratakesawa and Hadisoeperta, 1980). Suryasengkala uses Hijriyah year and Candrasengkala uses Saka/ Caka year which in its development eventually became the Javanese year (A.J). Events commonly used as disputes are birth and death, construction of a particular house or building, establishment or fall of a kingdom, marriage, writing a book (such as serat, chronicle), etc. (Macaryus, 2007, p.200). The Javanese chronogram, which is a sengkalan, can be in the form of writing only, drawing only (Adi, 2013, p.73), or drawing with writing, in contrast to chronograms in other regions such as Germany (picture 1) in the form of writing only. Sengkalan in the form of drawing called sengkalan memet.



Gambar 1. Chronogram I germany (source: Heyder, 2015)

The existence of sengkalan memet is a works of art created by Javanese people. Like other Javanese art works, the creator of Sengkalan memet is anonymous, it is unknown who the artist is and nobody claims that sengkalan memet is the result of his work. Creation is basically the activity of creative people in creating, carrying out,

embodying the existence of something with conceptual reality into existence with actual reality. Discussion about creation certainly involves the process. The process of creation can be stated as the physical process of the creator artist as an estuary driven by the results of his own thought process, the results of the reasoning process, in an effort to understand objects (Sunarto, 2013. p.107)

The creation process of sengkalan memet (figure 2) is preceded by phrase sentences composed of symbols of the year numbers. Numbers are signifier and words are signified which made by convention (Saussure as cited in Bevir, 1997, p.64). For example 1708 A. J. (Javanese year) contains the numbers 1, 7, 0, and 8. The four numbers each have a choice of words. Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 are given a 'character' or value in Javanese word. The numerical value of a word can be determined based on the meaning and characteristics of an entity that is the reference (Macaryus, 2007, p.201). The character of an entity reference referred to is regarding the amount, nature, form, and others. The character and values that have been set in the book or the *serat* that explains how to make sengkalan, Java seems to have a convention. This is in accordance with Adi stated (2013, p.75) that the year number mining in a series uses symbolism in the Javanese calendar which has been conventionally institutionalized and accepted by its community groups. The making of a value or character in the form of words from each number is told in the *Serat Gencaran*. Bratakesawa and Hadisoepuerta (1980) also predict the choice of words in the form of values or characters obtained from the value of numbers directly (for example, the eyes are two, then the eyes represent the number 2) or indirectly (parable or association).

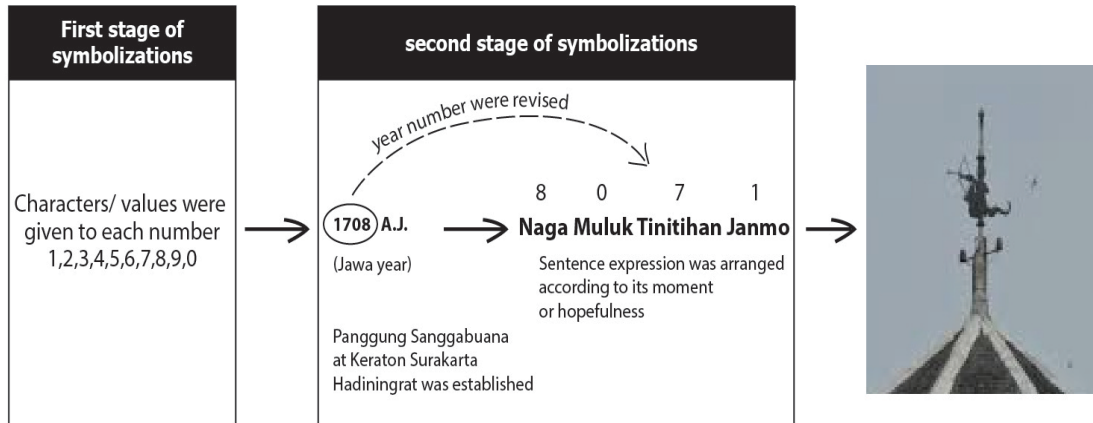
The sentence expression is arranged on the character chosen for each number. Examples of the character of each number can be seen in table 1 below:

| Number | Character/ value (in Javanese) | Meaning |
|--------|--|--|
| 1 | Tunggal, Gusti, Sujanma, Semedi, Nabi, Maha | One, unite; King, Allah; Good people, educated; Meditating; The Prophet; |
| 2 | Asta, Kalih, Nembah, Netra, Kembar, Swiwi | Very; Hand; two; Worship; Eye; same; Feather wings; |
| 3 | Bahni; Tiga; Katon; Kaya; Lir; Weda | Fire; Three; Seen; Income; As if; Doctrine |

Tabel 1. Number and its character in Sengkalan

The first stage of the symbolization in the process of creating sengkalan memet is the process of making the number as a symbol of a certain word which will be the basis for the year number and word choice. One number is represented by one word in sengkalan. The second stage of symbolization based on the analysis of sengkalan memet in various art artifacts of culture (table 2) is how the sentence is made. It is made


by symbolizing moments, events, and hopefulness at the time into an expression, not literally. The year number is reversed, and the selected character/ value is matched. Sengkalan memet process symbolization stage can be seen in figure 2. Sengkalan memet existing at the top of the building Panggung Sangga Buana Keraton Surakarta Hadiningrat in the form of sculpture showing a dragon driven by a human who is doing archery directing skyward (Sunaryo, 2013, p.26). Sengkalan which is read as *Naga Muluk Tinitihan Janma* (in Javanese) was interpreted to be a dragon driven by a human are taking off.




Gambar 2. The creation process of Sengkalan Memet on the top of the buliding Panggung Sanggabuwana Keraton Surakarta Hadiningrat (source: Listya, 2019)

The transformation from the sentence into the images Javanese does can be revealed through Panofsky's iconography (pre-iconographic and iconographic). The pre-iconography is the formalistic appeared of each sengkalan memet which is accordance to its art artifacts and place. Natural figures, human, and things and also myths such as human, dragon, plant (flora), are figures often outlined which derived from words given to the number as the convention. Then, iconography is the meaning that already exists in each sentence of sengkalan memet obtained from literature's data.


Based on existing literature studies, there are at least a number of artifacts that are inherited from Javanese culture. There is an artifact on the roof of a very tall building in Surakarta Palace (see table 2). There is also an artifact which is an iconography that is inside in an entrance building in the Yogyakarta palace (see table 3). We also find iconography in the form of "memetalan memet" that is in a temple relief (see table 4). There are also figures in Wayang Purwa who are present as "sengkalan memet". One of the figures is the *Buta Cakil* figure (see table 5). Finally, one form of "sengalan memet" can be seen in the wayang beber painting. So, Table 2, table 3, table 4, table 5 and table 6 are descriptions of the relationship between iconography, meaning, and sentences as manifestations of sengkalan memet. Mostly, the images of sengkalan memet are literally same to its sentence expression. There is only Cakil Shadow Puppet that have advanced stage of symbolizing.

| Place or art artifacts | Year and its event | First stage of symbolizing | Second stage of symbolizing : Sentence expression | Sengkalan Memet |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| The top of Panggung Sangga Buana Keraton Surakarta Hadiningrat | 1708 A. J. Building of Panggung Sangga Buana was established | Character/ value giving on number 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 | <i>Naga Muluk Tinitihan janmo</i> (in javanese), It means dragon as a human vehicle |  <p>Illustrated the same as the sentence, but in more detail of the human who is doing archery</p> |


Tabel 2. "Sengkalan Memet" artifacts at the Keraton Surakarta

| Place or art artifacts | Year and its event | First stage of symbolizing | Second stage of symbolizing : Sentence expression | Sengkalan Memet |
|------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Keraton Yogyakarta | 1682 A. J. Keraton Yogyakarta was established | Character/ value giving on number 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 | <i>Dwi Naga Rasa Tunggal</i> (in javanese), It means the two dragons unite in the same feeling |  <p>Illustrated the same as the sentence, with symmetrically balance.</p> |


Tabel 3. "Sengkalan Memet" artifacts at the Keraton Yogyakarta

| Place or art artifacts | Year and its event | First stage of symbolizing | Second stage of symbolizing : Sentence expression | Sengkalan Memet |
|------------------------|--------------------|---|--|--|
| The temple relief | 1318 A. J. | Character/ value giving on number 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 | <i>Naga (8) Raja (1) Anahut (3) Surya (1)</i> (in javanese), It means dragon king eating a sun |  <p>Literally Illustrated the same as the sentence, with ornaments</p> |

Tabel 4. "Sengkalan Memet" artifacts at the relief of the temple

| Place or art artifacts | Year and its event | First stage of symbolizing | Second stage of symbolizing : Sentence expression | Sengkalan Memet |
|------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Wayang Kulit | 1552 A. J. The first time Cakil puppet was made | Character/ value giving on number 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 | <i>Tangan</i> (2) <i>Yaksa</i> (5) <i>Satataning</i> (5) <i>Jalma</i> (1) (in javanese), Giant hands are arranged as human hands |  <p>Illustrated the same as the art artifact itself, which is shadow puppet. This is even another symbolization of the sentence, which refers to the character of Shadow Puppet named Cakil</p> |

Tabel 5. "Sengkalan Memet" artifacts at the Wayang Purwa

| Place or art artifacts | Year and its event | First stage of symbolizing | Second stage of symbolizing : Sentence expression | Sengkalan Memet |
|------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Wayang Beber | 1614 A. J. Describing the market atmosphere in the city during Beber puppet was made. | Character/ value giving on number 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 | <i>Gawe</i> (4) <i>Srabi</i> (1) <i>Jinawah</i> (6) <i>Ing Wong</i> (1) (in javanese) |  <p>Illustrated the same as the sentence, but in more shopisticated detail of the conditions at that time</p> |

Tabel 6. "Sengkalan Memet" artifacts at the Wayang Beber

CONCLUSION

Chronograms as a time writing can be created into various forms including images only. Sengkalan memet is an image representation of a sentence that describes the moment and hopefulness of its time. The sengkalan memet creation step process starts from the form years number digits to the form of images only through two even three stages of symbolization,. The symbolism is philosophical. The creation of sengkalan memet through many steps process of symbolizing proving that Java as part of Nusantara (the archipelago) has the potential for creativity in high artistic work. Events or moments in the past are considered by Javanese people as something important to be realized in their traditional artifacts. Why Javanese sometimes do not put texts together with its image on sengkalan memet as chronogram still not revealed.

Research on Sengkalan from various perspectives and other sciences is still open to do, as well as other art objects in Nusantara. For further research, it is expected to reveal how the symbolization of numbers becomes a certain character and why the writing of year numbers is reversed in order to enrich the aesthetic knowledge of Nusantara.

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