

The Influence of the Javanese Political Concept of Power on President Sukarno

Baskara T. Wardaya
Sanata Dharma University, ✉ baskara@usd.ac.id

Article history

Received : 2021-02-07
Accepted : 2021-09-13
Published : 2021-09-30

Keywords

Sukarno,
Indonesia,
Javanese concept of
power.

Abstract: Various studies have shown a strong connection between political leaders' views and practices with the culture and tradition of their upbringing. This was also the case with Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia. Being born and raised on the island of Java, Sukarno was greatly influenced by the Javanese concepts of power, especially the concepts about a Javanese ruler's self-understanding, domestic politics, and international relations. As expressed in many of his speeches and writings, Sukarno deeply understood the Javanese concept of power and tried to operate around the concept. Based on his understanding of the concept, for instance, he considered himself a Javanese ruler. As President of Indonesia, he implemented his knowledge of the Javanese concept of power in his domestic politics as well as in his relations with other nations on the world stage. The influence of the Javanese concept of power, however, was not static. It was as dynamic as to how Sukarno responded to the dynamics of Indonesian and international politics throughout his political career. Using historical and cultural approaches to Sukarno's political life, this research intends to explore how the Javanese concept of power greatly influenced Sukarno's political views and practices. It will show that the beliefs and practices helped Sukarno unify Indonesia and obtain international prominence. At the same time, it also led him to the uncelebrated last days of his political life.

Abstrak: Berbagai studi telah menunjukkan adanya kaitan yang kuat antara pandangan dan praktik-praktik politik seorang pemimpin politik dengan budaya dan tradisi yang telah membesarkannya. Hal ini juga berlaku untuk Sukarno, Presiden pertama Indonesia. Sebagaimana akan ditunjukkan dalam tulisan ini, sebagai seseorang yang dilahirkan di Pulau Jawa, Sukarno amat dipengaruhi oleh konsep Jawa tentang kekuasaan, terutama konsep tentang pemahaman diri seorang penguasa Jawa, tentang politik dalam negeri dan tentang hubungan internasional. Sebagaimana terungkap dalam berbagai pidato dan tulisan-tulisannya, Sukarno tidak hanya sungguh-sungguh memahami konsep kekuasaan Jawa, melainkan juga mencoba untuk mempraktikkan konsep tersebut. Berdasarkan pemahaman atas konsep kekuasaan Jawa, misalnya, ia memandang diri sebagai seorang penguasa Jawa. Sebagai Presiden Indonesia ia juga mengimplementasikan pemahamannya akan konsep kekuasaan Jawa terkait politik dalam negeri maupun hubungan dengan negara-negara lain di panggung dunia. Namun demikian pengaruh itu sama sekali tidak bersifat statis. Pengaruh tersebut bersifat dinamis, seiring dengan respon Sukarno terhadap berbagai perkembangan politik yang ada, baik di tingkat dalam negeri maupun dalam kaitannya dengan perkembangan politik dunia pada umumnya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis dan kultural atas kiprah politik Sukarno, tulisan ini bermaksud untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana pandangan dan kiprah politik Sukarno sangat kuat dipengaruhi oleh konsep kekuasaan Jawa. Tulisan ini juga akan menunjukkan bagaimana pandangan dan kiprah politik Sukarno telah membantunya dalam menyatukan Indonesia dan dikenal secara internasional. Pada saat yang sama pengaruh itu juga telah membawanya ke akhir kehidupan politik yang kurang menyenangkan.



Cite this article: Wardaya, B.T, (2021). The Influence of the Javanese Political Concept of Power on President Sukarno. *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal*, 31(2), 227-238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v31i2.28928>

Available online at
<http://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/index.php/paramita>

INTRODUCTION

A sizable body of research has been done on the connection between historical and cultural background with a political leader's views and practices (Confino, 1997; Michaud et al., 2009; Nunn, 2012). While Confino reminds us of how the reconstruction of the past affected power relations in the society (Confino, 1997, p. 1393), Michaud, Carlisle, and Smith emphasize the strong connection between political knowledge and world-view, and Nunn demonstrates how culture as heuristic or rules of thumb are influential in the decision-making process, in this case, political decision-making process. They all agree that historical and cultural perspectives help put one's views and practices into a broader context.

Concerning Sukarno, a political leader who was one of Indonesia's founding fathers and the country's first president, some works have been dedicated to studying his views and political practices. Among them are Hindley (1962), Hauswedell (1973), Kartodirdjo (2001), and Argenti (2018). Regarding writing of Sukarno when he was still in power, Hindley wrote about how the president's views and political practices opened the possibility for the communists to hold important political positions (Hindley, 1962, pp. 915-926). Meanwhile writing in the post-Sukarno era, Hauswedell explains Sukarno's political views and practices from the standpoint of the controversial events of October 1, 1965, and the anti-communist purge that followed. Kartodirdjo writes about the socio-cultural background of young Sukarno. From more recent perspectives, Argenti discusses Sukarno's political views and practices from the perspective of the Guided Democracy (Argenti, 2018, pp. 46-63). These studies, however, failed to examine the extent to which his Javanese background influenced his understanding of himself, of the social-political dynamics of Indonesian politics, and Indonesia's (and his own) role in international relations.

Since Sukarno was born and raised in Java, this research paper argues, most of his understanding of himself and the world around him was strongly influenced by Javanese cultures and tradition, including the Javanese concept of power. Moreover, this research paper also argues that it is important to teach our students about the political views and practices of Sukarno, since he was not only one of Indonesia's founding fathers, but also Indonesia's first President who governed the nation during its first 20 years of history as an independent republic. To the students, we need to demonstrate that President Sukarno's political views and practic-

es did not come out of the blue. Instead, they grew out of a certain context, in this case the context of his Javanese upbringing. This research, therefore, intends to explore Sukarno's political views and practices within the context of his historical and cultural background. More specifically, this paper intends to discuss Sukarno's political views and practices from the Javanese concept of power in which Sukarno grew up.

In describing the Javanese concept of power, Anderson (1990) foregrounds key concepts regarding how a Javanese political ruler being perceived and perceived himself as a leader; how the ruler conducts domestic politics; and how he conducts foreign relations. Before delineating each of the features, Anderson reminds us that in general, the Javanese concept of power differs from that of the West. In the West, Anderson argues, power is perceived as abstract; having heterogeneous sources; having no inherent limits, and morally ambiguous. Meanwhile, Anderson further argues, the Javanese concept of power understands power as being concrete; homogeneous; having constant quantum in the universe; and has no question of legitimacy (Anderson, 1990, pp. 19-20).

Based on such general notions of the Javanese concept of power, Anderson proposes the key features of the concept. *First*, regarding how a Javanese ruler being perceived, Anderson demonstrates that according to the Javanese concept, power (which exists in itself) is realized in a person who should have the character of being "syncretic and absorptive" (Anderson, 1990, p. 38). In light of perceiving the homogeneity of power, the Javanese concept claims that the ruler has a symbolic ability to unify and to concentrate different aspects of power (Anderson, 1990, p. 36). Besides, being the ruler of Java, the person should have royal ancestry, meaning he had to have ancestors who once ruled Java. In this case, the ruler does not have to be his direct ancestor, as long as he was part of a ruling dynasty. Anderson explains that the ancestral link typically "are made with the most powerful and celebrated representatives of those dynasties." (Anderson, 1990, p. 39).

Second, concerning how a Javanese leader conducts domestic politics, Anderson argues that according to the concept, a true ruler is capable of unifying opposing forces. He explains that the Javanese concept of power emphasizes the importance of a leader's "ability to contain opposites and to absorb his adversaries are important elements in a leader's claim to have Power" (Anderson, 1990, p. 31). Anderson contends, the Javanese con-

cept of power emphasizes the importance of a leader's ability to concentrate within himself antagonistic opposites. He believes: "The most obvious sign of the man of Power [*sic.*] is, quite consistently, his ability to concentrate: to focus his own inner Power, to absorb Power from the outside, and to concentrate within himself apparently antagonistic opposites" (Anderson, 1990, p. 28). Another obvious sign, in Anderson's view, is "the ability to concentrate opposites..." (Anderson, 1990, p. 28).

In his domestic politics, the ruler should emphasize the importance of unity over his political domain. The unity should be fought at all costs. The unity, Anderson explains, "is in itself a central symbol of Power, and it is this fact as much as the overt goals of statist ideologies that help to account for the obsessive concern with the oneness that suffuses the political thinking of many ... Javanese." (Anderson, 1990, p. 36). He believed that this notion is explicitly signified the term *manunggal* or to unify (Anderson, 1990, p. 37). Along with the idea of unity, the Javanese concept does not recognize mutual obligations between superior and subordinate. In Anderson's words, "Traditional thought clearly did not allow for any forms of social contract or conceptualized system of mutual obligation between superior and subordinate" (Anderson, 1990, pp. 58-59).

Third, concerning how a Javanese leader conducts foreign relations, Anderson shows that the Javanese concept of power subscribes to the Indic-origin concepts, namely *mandala* and *chakravartin*. According to Moertono (1968) *mandala* is a political concept in which the circle of influence, interest, or ambition is practiced by a Javanese ruler in "a complex of geopolitical relations" (Moertono in Anderson, 1990, p. 43) on boundaries maintenance and relations with other political entities. Among others, the geopolitical relations would include self-assertion and world domination as well as calculated dynamics "to disturb the equilibrium of interstate relations". It would also involve a "circle of alignment and alienation" with the hope of the creation of universal peace ministered "by the establishment of a world-state with a sole and supreme ruler." (Moertono, 1968, p. 71). The stage in which a peaceful world is ruled under a sole supreme leader, Moertono explains, is what the Javanese concept of power calls *chakravartin* (Moertono, 1968, p. 71). To his observations on these three features, Anderson adds, that "[i]n spite of Dutch colonialism, the Japanese occupation, the nationalist revolution, and the socio-economic changes they brought about, the cultural grip of this traditional perspective re-

main very strong" (Anderson, 1990, pp. 72-73). The cultural grip, in turn, not only shapes "the perceptions (and thus the interpretations) of those who wear them but, in so doing," Anderson continues, "influence their behavior" (Anderson, 1990, p. 18).

Sukarno was born in the city of Surabaya, on the island of Java, Indonesia, on June 6, 1901. Sukarno's father was a Moslem from Java, and his mother was a Hindu from Bali. However, since he grew up in Java, Sukarno was more influenced by the Javanese culture. As Sukarno himself admitted, other than from his casual interaction with his fellow Javanese, he also learned many Javanese cultural and traditional concepts of power from watching Javanese *wayang* (shadow play) performances. As *wayang* performances typically convey traditional Javanese concepts and teachings through narrating the Indic-inspired epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the young Sukarno absorbed those concepts and teachings gladly and with ease (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 101-102, 179). Among the concepts, he absorbed from his upbringing was the Javanese concept of political power.

At the same time, it should be noted that since Javanese culture and tradition were influenced by other cultures and traditions (Anderson, 1990, p. 19), through his Javanese upbringing Sukarno also learned about other cultures and traditions. This was evident from his views of himself and his role in the world; his views on politics during his tenure as the holder of the highest office of the nation he helped liberate from colonialism; and his views on the role that Indonesia (and himself) should play in the post-colonial international relations.

Based on Anderson's theory on the Javanese concept of power described above, and also based on Sukarno's historical and cultural background as well as on the utterances regarding his political views and practices, this research aims at exploring the influence of the Javanese concept of power on (a) Sukarno's views of himself; (b) Sukarno's views of domestic politics; and (c) Sukarno's views of international relations.

In today's educational context, it is very important to help students and young people in general to be able to see the history of our political leaders (and leaders in other fields as well) from their cultural or traditional background to understand them better. By understanding their historical and cultural background, not only will the students be able to better understand the leaders' political views and practices, but also to offer ideas and suggestions regarding these leaders in more acceptable ways for the sake of the common good. For this

purpose, it is hoped that this present study will open the doors for more in-depth research on the influence of historical and cultural background on political leaders, past and present.

METHOD

This study is based on a qualitative library research using document analysis method (Bowen, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2012; Rapley, 2011). Describing the method, Bowen says that document analysis method is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents [as] material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Bowen states further, “[l]ike other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” which include making sense of and “synthesizing data contained in documents” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). The research results are then organized into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis (Bowen, 2009; Labuschagne, 2003).

Documents being researched for this paper were written texts of Sukarno's utterances concerning his political views and practices as they are expressed in his speeches, writings, and interviews. These written texts include Sukarno's *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi* (or Under the Revolutionary Flag, 1964), *Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams* (1965), *Amanat Proklamasi I, 1945-1950* (or The Mandate of the Revolution, vol. 1, 1945-1950, publ.1985) and *Revolusi Belum Selesai* (or The Revolution Continues, 2014). In this study, data gained from the documents were interpreted and analyzed by using Anderson's theory of the Javanese concept of power (Anderson, 1990).

In finding and discussion section, this present study will explore the three features listed above. First, it will discuss how the Javanese concept of power influenced Sukarno in how he perceived himself and how he presented himself to his people and to the wider world. Next, it will see how the Javanese concept had an impact on the way he conducted politics within Indonesia during its 20 first years of independence from colonialism. Lastly, this section will look at how the same concept of power had an influence on how Sukarno conducted relations with other nations, including the United Nations.

JAVANESE CONCEPT OF POWER AND SUKARNO'S VIEWS OF HIMSELF

As we have seen, Anderson argues that in the view of the Javanese concept of power, a true Javanese

leader or ruler should have the character of being “syncretic and absorptive” (Anderson, 1990, p. 38). With this character, the ruler is able to unify and to concentrate different aspects of power (Anderson, 1990, p. 36). Influenced by this concept, Sukarno often presented himself as having the ability to syncretize and absorb different religious teachings and political theories needed to enable him to hold power as a true Javanese ruler. In his book, *An Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams* (Sukarno, 1965) he said:

My politics do not correspond to anyone else's. But, then, neither does my background correspond to anyone else's. My grandfather inculcated in me *Javanism* and mysticism. From Father came Theosophy and Islamism. From Mother, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Sarinah gave me humanism. From Tjokro comes socialism. From his friends came Nationalism. To that, I added gleanings of Karl Marxism and Thomas Jeffersonism. I learned economics from Sun Yat-sen, benevolence from Gandhi. I was able to synthesize modern scientific schooling with ancient animistic culture and to translate the end product into the living, breathing messages of hope geared to the understanding of a peasant. What came out has been called—in plain terms—Sukarnoism” (Sukarno, 1965, p. 76 emphasis added).

With such remarks, Sukarno demonstrated that he was able to blend elements from different political and religious traditions as expected from a true Javanese ruler or leader (Dahm, 1969, p. 39). The inclusion of Karl Marx, Jefferson, and Sun Yat-sen are indicative of Sukarno's desire to show that he had the ability not only to syncretize and absorb different traditional values and wisdom, but also to syncretize and absorb modern political and economic theories.

Affirming Anderson's contention that in the Javanese concept of power a ruler should have royal ancestry, Sukarno claimed that he came from a line of a royal family. In the above-mentioned autobiography, for instance, he claimed to have the right and legitimacy to be a ruler because he had familial link with the pre-colonial kings of Java. He claimed himself as being the descendant of Java's great kings, especially the king of the Kediri Kingdom (Sukarno, 1965, p. 19). He also claimed that he had a familial connection with the king of Singaraja, Bali. Sukarno uttered:

I am the child of a Balinese mother of the Brahmin class. My mother, Idaju, is of high caste descent. The last King of Singaraja was the uncle of

my mother. My father was from Java. His full name was Raden Sukemi Sosrodihardjo. Raden is the title of nobility meaning "Lord." Father was descended from the Sultan of Kediri (Sukarno, 1965, p. 19).

Sukarno's claim reflects what Anderson said that a Javanese ruler has to have a claim of royalty, although the royalty connection does not have to be a direct line of ancestry. It is sufficient, Anderson states, as long as the royals being claimed by the ruler are among "the most powerful and celebrated representatives" of the royal dynasties (Anderson, 1990, p. 39). As we have seen in the same remarks, to show that he deserved to be a ruler of Java, Sukarno did not only claim of being the descendant of one royal family but *two* royal families, one from Java and another from Bali. To convince his Moslem supporters, Sukarno also claimed himself of being the descendant of the celebrated Javanese Muslim proselytizing holy man from Central Java named Sunan Kalijaga (Anderson, 1990, pp. 39-40).

Meanwhile, to his non-traditional readers, Sukarno showed that he was born with special signs, which should be understood as evidence that as a Javanese he was not just an ordinary Javanese but a Javanese ruler, and that as a Javanese ruler he was not just an ordinary Javanese ruler, but a Javanese ruler with a soft heart. He proudly declared:

My birthday is double six. June six. It is my supreme good fortune to have been born under Gemini, the sign of twins. And that is me exactly. Two extremes. I can be gentle or exacting; hard as steel, or poetic. My personality is a mixture of reason and emotion. I am forgiving and I am unyielding. I put enemies of the State behind bars, yet I cannot keep a bird in a cage (Sukarno, 1965, p. 17).

These facts, along with the fact that he was born at dawn and in the first year of a new century (1901), Sukarno claimed, was an indication that he was a special individual with a special mission to his people and his country, and perhaps even to the world in general (Sukarno, 1965, p. 17). This kind of claim certainly conforms to the view that Sukarno was strongly influenced by the Javanese concept of power which he learned since childhood. As a result, in Anderson's words, Sukarno was "not simply... a Javanese, or... an Indonesian, but... a Javanese ruler" (Anderson, 1990, p. 200). Understanding himself as a true Javanese ruler, and under the influence of the Javanese concept of power, however, Sukarno wanted to extend his authority and influence beyond Java. He wanted to reach out to other

islands as well. "Our proud ground was once called Nusantara," he elucidated. "*Nusa* means island. *Antara* means these thousands of islands" (Sukarno, 1965, p. 43). It was to "these thousands of islands" that Sukarno wanted to extend his authority as a Javanese ruler.

JAVANESE CONCEPT OF POWER AND SUKARNO'S VIEWS OF DOMESTIC POLITICS

Influenced by the Javanese concept of power in which a Javanese leader or ruler should be able to concentrate within himself antagonistic opposites (Anderson, 1990), Sukarno tried to concentrate within himself antagonistic opposites in Indonesian politics of his time. In what he called "Nasakom" (a short form of "*nasionalisme, agama, dan komunisme*"), for instance, he tried to unify these antagonistic political opposites and make them work together for the country. This was clear when he stated:

Nasakom is the title encompassing the three forces on which our country is balanced: *Nas* meaning the non-Communist Nationalists, *A* for *Agama* meaning the anti-Communist religionists, and *Kom* meaning the Communist Party. I even start *Nasakom* with *Nas*, not *Kom*. Many communists whose bones fill the unmarked graves of Digul were great fighters. They remain great patriots today. Always they have been behind Sukarno." (Sukarno, 1965, p. 294).

Besides this statement, at one point Sukarno even declared himself as at once nationalist, a religious person, and a communist (Anderson, 1990, pp. 29-30). For Anderson, such declaration fits perfectly within the view of the Javanese concept of political power, in which normally a ruler had "a powerful claim to the possession of Power" (Anderson, 1990, pp. 29-30).

In the eyes of Sukarno as a political leader who adhered to the Javanese concept of power, Anderson describes, "all other political actors were condemned to subordinate roles as parts of the system," while Sukarno was the central power holder, "absorbing all within himself, making the syncretic conquest" (Anderson, 1990, pp. 29-30; see also Adams, 1967, p. 212). Sukarno said that he did all the absorption and syncretizing because as a true leader he wanted to unify all of Indonesia's revolutionary forces. "[P]recisely because I want my nation to be victorious both in the past and at present", he said, "I work my fingers to the bone to unify all forces which are revolutionary—whether they be Moslem, Nationalists or Communist" (Sukarno in Agung,

1990, p. 283).

As Anderson also explained, another central Javanese concept regarding domestic politics is the strong emphasis on the importance of unity. In the Javanese concept of power, a ruler should be a strong promoter of political unity. The emphasis on unity is well expressed in the Javanese terms such as *eka*, *tunggal*, and *manunggal*, which all have a connotation with one-ness and unity (Anderson, 1990, p. 37). Inspired by this concept of unity, Sukarno constantly appealed for national unity (Anderson, 1990, p. 36).

As published in the book *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi* (1964) even as early as 1928, when he was still in his twenties, Sukarno already promoted the importance of unity for Indonesia. He wrote, "the spirit of Indonesian unity has been adopted everywhere. The spirit of the Indonesian unity is the reason why there is no more arguing between the left against the right" (Sukarno, 1964, p. 109). The promotion of unity was continued and was repeated throughout Sukarno's service as President. In his speech commemorating the first anniversary of the Indonesian independence on August 17, 1946, as published in the book *Amanat Proklamasi I, 1945-1950* (1985), Sukarno appealed for unity: "My beloved people of Indonesia!... Keep the unity. Once again, keep the unity" (Sukarno, 1985, p. 33). On the fifth anniversary of Indonesian independence, on August 17, 1950, Sukarno reiterated the same message: "The 'Proclamation Spirit' is the spirit of *unity*, a total unity without excluding any groups or factions" (Sukarno, 1985, p. 109, emphasis added).

As a leader who was influenced by the Javanese concept of power, Sukarno's urge for unity was also reflected in his refusal of the federal system of government for Indonesia as it had been proposed by the Dutch colonialists. In a strong statement against federalism, Sukarno pronounced:

Our souls continue to crave for that one thing, which is the thing we meant at the time of the proclamation in East Pegangsaan [Street] five years ago. What is that one thing? It is none other than the Unitary State, which is not divided in an organization and in spirit. None other than one country, which covers the entire Indonesian archipelago, "from Sabang to Merauke". Nothing but a form of state administration that is not federalistic. One National State, one *Nationale Staat!* Was there one Indonesian who on 17 August 1945 remembers federalism, thinks about federalism, and mentions federalism? From the leadership holders to brother Marhaen in the villages, from adults to conscious children, from the most extreme to the most lenient, there was no one, no

one who at the time of the proclamation wanted or remembered the federal state administration. All, yes all, think, aspire, and have a unitary spirit! (Sukarno, 1985, p. 88).

In Anderson's view, Sukarno's support for the popular hostility against the idea of the Federal Republic of Indonesia (1949-50) was "not simply the explicit suspicion that its component states were puppets of Dutch creation" (Anderson, 1990, p. 36). More than that, the federal system was viewed as being incompatible with the Javanese concept of power in which "oneness is Power and multiplicity is diffusion and weakness" (Anderson, 1990, p. 36).

The influence of the Javanese concept was also reflected in Sukarno's rejection of the liberal system of democracy, along with his appeal to replace it with his own political concept of the so-called "guided democracy." In explaining what he meant by guided democracy, Sukarno presented:

Indonesian democracy, much misunderstood outside our shores, works on a consensus, not a show of hands. We could no longer afford this Western democracy with its majority voting, where 51 percent wins and 49 percent ends up with a grudge... In Guided Democracy the key ingredient is leadership. After hearing the general views and contra views, The Guider summarizes the points into a compromise palatable to each faction. No one side wins totally to the exclusion of the others. Only strong leadership is capable of synthesizing the final decision; otherwise, the system will not work (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 278-279).

Although the explanation sounded very impartial, in further explanation Sukarno indicated that "The Guider" would be none other than he himself. He said: "We no longer had to please the Dutch and it suddenly seemed pointless to play the figurehead role legally when I assume the dominant one actually" (Sukarno, 1965, p. 279). Sukarno wanted Indonesia to adopt the "guided democracy" system, but him and him alone would be "The Guider" of and provider of "strong leadership" for that "democracy". In other words, he wanted to hold power without being challenged by his subordinates, much like the Javanese concept of power concerning an ideal Javanese ruler. In Anderson's view, in light of the Javanese concept of power, Sukarno's proposition of the guided democracy system, along with his rejection of the federal system, could be seen as a reflection of his fear of the decline of himself as the center of a unified Indonesia (Anderson, 1990, p. 36).

Moreover, Anderson viewed Sukarno's rejection as a sign that the President was influenced by the Javanese concept in which "oneness is Power and multiplicity is diffusion and weakness." For Sukarno, breaking up Indonesia into autonomous states in which the federal government only had partial control of each of the states, would only cause diffusion and weakness of the central power (Anderson, 1990, p. 36). Commenting on Sukarno's rejection of the federal system and other Western political systems from the Javanese concept of power, Anderson writes: "Within a traditional Javanese framework the multiparty system, the constitutional separation of powers, and federalism were easily interpreted to mean the decline of Indonesia's international Power and that of Sukarno himself as to its political focus" (Anderson, 1990, p. 36).

As expressed in the book *Revolusi Belum Selesai* (2014) Sukarno's strong and repeated appeal for the "unification" (*penyatuan*) of West Papua territory to Indonesia could also be seen as a result of the influence of the Javanese concept of unity on Sukarno (Sukarno, 2014, p. 433). Sukarno said: "Compared to our archipelago, West Irian is the size of *kelor* leaf [meaning insignificantly small], yet West Irian is a part of our body. Would anybody allow one of his limbs to be amputated without putting up a fight? Does not a man cry out in pain if even the tiniest finger of his and is cut off?" (Sukarno, 1965, p. 287). "Uniting" West Papua to the Indonesian territory was a non-negotiable matter for Sukarno, and he was not reluctant to fight for the unification. He demanded the integration of the territory to Indonesia through the United Nations (UN) and the United States (US) government. He succeeded, and he was happy that on "the first of May, 1963, West Irian was liberated and returned to the fold" (Sukarno, 1965, p. 288). In a different but similar case, in the name of Indonesian unity Sukarno also rejected the formation of the Malaysian Federation by the British. Sukarno urged that the plan for establishing federation be aborted. He feared that such a federation would create a threat for Indonesian unity as a Malaysian federation would not be "a friendly neighbor" and would be backed by the British military (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 300-304).

JAVANESE CONCEPT OF POWER AND SUKARNO'S VIEWS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

As described above, according to Anderson, on the issue of international relations the Javanese concept of power adopted the Indian concept of *Mandala*

and *Chakravartin*. Based on this concept, the Javanese believed that a Javanese ruler had the duty to extend the *mandala* or the circle of his authority and influence on the international stage. The ultimate goal of such extension should be to make possible the birth of a world government under a sole ruler or *chakravartin*. With the *chakravartin* presiding over the world government, it was expected, conflicts among nations would be replaced by peaceful international collaboration (Anderson, 1990, pp. 43-44; Moertono, 1968, p. 71).

Influenced by the concept of the *mandala*, during his political activities in the struggle for independence Sukarno never thought of liberating only the island Java from colonialism. Although he was born and raised in Java, Sukarno wanted to extend his circle of authority and influence beyond Java. It is, therefore, instead of just liberating his home island of Java, Sukarno wanted to liberate the whole former Dutch East Indies. This is because he pictured himself as a ruler of Java. As a ruler of Java who believed in the *mandala* concept, he felt that he was obliged to reach areas beyond Java.

Inspired by the same concept, when he eventually became the official ruler of Indonesia, Sukarno wanted to extend his influence beyond Indonesia. For this, he started to reach out to the people of Asia and Africa. This was done by hosting the first conference of Asian and African nations in the city of Bandung in 1955. In the conference, he gathered nearly 30 newly independent nations from the two continents to meet and to chart the future together. In his opening speech for the conference on April 18, 1955, Sukarno told the conference participants:

I hope that it [this conference] will give evidence of the fact that we Asian and African leaders understand that Asia and Africa can prosper only when they are united, and that even the safety of the world at large cannot be safeguarded without a united Asia-Africa. I hope that this conference will give guidance to mankind, will point out to mankind the way which must be taken to attain security and peace. I hope that it will prove that Asia and Africa have been reborn, that a New Asia and a New Africa have been born! (Sukarno in Widyatmadja, 2002, p. 10).

Commenting on the conference during its 8th-anniversary commemoration, Sukarno stated that the Bandung conference had outlined:

from *exploitation de l'homme par l'homme*, a new world of abiding peace, of friendship among nations, and social justice for us all. The world is truly being transformed before our eyes. And the

nations of Asia and Africa are in the forefront of the struggle to build the world anew.” (Sukarno in Modelski, 1963, p. 1).

In Sukarno’s view, under the leadership of Indonesia, i.e. of Sukarno, the nations of Asia and Africa were not only able to establish friendship among themselves, but also to transform the whole world for the better. Commenting further, he said that the conference presented “...various principles for the promotion of world peace and co-operation” (Sukarno in Modelski, 1963), following the concept of *mandala* and *chakravartin*.

Further still, Sukarno was also keen on connecting himself with world leaders of both sides of the Cold War, Western countries as well as Socialist nations. He went and visited many countries, and thanks to these international visits he became a Third World political figure who drew global attention. He charmed the world as the Cuban President Fidel Castro and the American President John F. Kennedy also charmed the world (Shambazy, 2001, p. 314). Equally, Sukarno also liked to invite these leaders to come and to visit Indonesia. Other than having many Asian and African heads of state come to Indonesia in 1955 for the Bandung Conference, in 1960, he invited Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to visit him. Khrushchev came and spent almost two weeks (February 18 to March 1, 1960) in Indonesia (Khrushchev, 1967, pp. 353-374). Sukarno was very pleased with the media coverage he received during the Khrushchev visit. “When Khrushchev was here,” he said proudly, “100 foreign newsmen swarmed all over, constantly underfoot” (Sukarno, 1965, p. 14). Sukarno was equally pleased that when he visited Moscow more than a hundred musicians played *Indonesia Raya*, the Indonesian national anthem, to welcome him. “It brought tears of pride to my eyes that our land had come to this,” Sukarno remarked (Sukarno, 1965, p. 295).

Other than Khrushchev, Sukarno also invited U.S. President John F. Kennedy to visit him in Indonesia. Sukarno was very happy when in late 1963 Kennedy promised to visit him sometime in the spring of 1964. The Indonesian president even set up a plan to build a special guest house for the American President. “I was so excited that I put a team of architects and engineers onto readying a special guest house for him on the grounds of the palace,” he said (Sukarno, 1965, p. 296). He told the US Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard Jones: “Tell President Kennedy not to hesitate. Tell him to come. Tell him he will get a warm reception the like of which has never been seen in Indonesia” (JFK

Library, 1963, p. 1). On another occasion, while pointing at the site where the Kennedy guest house was going to be constructed, Sukarno told Jones: “I want President Kennedy to be my first guest there.” Laughing, the President then added: “Tell President Kennedy if he comes to Manila and doesn’t come to Jakarta, I’ll blow up the White House” (JFK Library, 1962, p.1). In return to Sukarno’s cordial relation with Kennedy, in July 1961 the American President sent a letter to President Sukarno, inviting Sukarno’s son Guntur to study in the U.S. (JFK Library, 1961, p. 1). Alas, Kennedy was never able to fulfill his promise to visit Indonesia. In November 1963 he was assassinated. Yet Sukarno was always proud of himself for being able to build a friendship with Kennedy, who was the de facto leader of the Cold War’s Western bloc (Adams, 1967, p. 211; Sukarno, 1965, p. 296). The close personal relationship with the leaders of the Eastern bloc and Western bloc of the Cold War as well as with leaders of Asian and African nations, in turn, was for Sukarno a sign that as expected by the Javanese concept of power he was capable of being a unifying force in the world.

When the East-West tension of the Cold War increased, Sukarno categorized world’s political forces into two different groups, namely the “Oldefos”, or the Old-Established Forces group, and the “Nefos” or the New Emerging Forces group (Wardaya, 2007, p. 311). While putting former colonialists and Western countries in the first group, Sukarno put Indonesia and other newly-independent countries in the second group. Sukarno articulated:

... Indonesia was the first to divide Nefos and Oldefos. Indonesia was the one that asked all Nefos nations to unite and challenge Oldefos. I always say Forces, New Emerging Forces; not New Emerging Nations or the New Emerging States or New Emerging Governments. No. It doesn’t have to be a nation. It doesn’t have to be an official entity. No. Force, Force. And for us to be able to build a new world, we need to unite all the New Emerging Forces to challenge the Old Established Forces which want to keep the old order. The old order of the world practice *exploitation de l’homme par l’homme* and *exploitation de nation par nation*.... (Sukarno, 2014, p. 703).

To demonstrate the power and solidarity among members of the second group, in 1963 Sukarno hosted the so-called “Ganefo” or Games of the New Emerging Forces (Sukarno, 2014, pp. 698-706). To Indonesian athletes who were going to join the Ganefo Sukarno stated:

So it is so true that you are going to Ganefo....as the first Indonesian sons and daughters to bring the idea of Nefos. It is, therefore, show that all you are truly young men and women of Nefos. Show that you are truly seeing friendship and close collaboration with all forces of Nefos all over the world (Sukarno, 2014, p. 703).

All these moves unmistakably reflect the influence of the *mandala* concept on Sukarno. It influenced him not only on how he viewed international relations but also on how he played a role on the global stage.

Meanwhile, as a reflection of being influenced by the concept of *chakravartin* or world-government under a sole leader from the Javanese concept of power, Sukarno expected UN would work on the realization of the concept (Sukarno, 1960). Only shortly after Indonesia officially became a unitary state, in September 1950, Sukarno decided that Indonesia should join the UN. Indonesia then became its 60th member of the UN, under the sponsorship of India (Sitamala, 2020; Taylor, 1965). Sukarno remembered, during the revolutionary war between Indonesia and the Netherlands, through the Committee of Good Offices, the UN had tried to mediate the two warring parties (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 250-251) and had great hope for the world body—although later he was disappointed by it (Sukarno, 1965, p. 287).

As a leader of a nation member of the UN, Sukarno tried to urge the world-body to become a world government and to protect and to serve all nations of the world while guided by shared universal principles. For this, when giving a speech titled “To Build the World Anew”, to the world body in September 1960 Sukarno introduced Pancasila (Sukarno, 1960). He hoped that Indonesia’s state ideology would become an inspiration not only for other nations but also for the UN itself in creating peace and collaborations among all nations (Sukarno, 1960). During the speech at the UN and after giving a lengthy explanation about the Indonesian state-ideology Pancasila (Sukarno, 1960, pp. 16-19), the Indonesian President confidently declared:

Among the nations, if there are rich and poor, who exploit and are exploited, there will also be clashes. Eliminate the causes that gave rise to the clash, and the clash will be gone. This is true, both internationally and within a nation. The elimination of imperialism and colonialism eliminates such exploitation of the nation by nation. I believe that there is a way out of the confrontation of these ideologies. I believe that the solution lies in

the universal use of Panca Sila! (Sukarno, 1960, pp. 19-20).

It is proved that under the influence of the concepts of *mandala* and *chakravartin*, Sukarno did not only want to have authority or influence over Java or Indonesia but also over the world in general. Anderson points out that this Sukarno’s ambition is in line with the global desire in the Javanese concept of power, as reflected in the Javanese royal names such as Paku Buwana, Hamengku Buwana, and Paku Alam, in which the word *buwana* means universe and *alam* refers to the whole natural world (Anderson, 1990, p. 45). The status given to the Javanese ruler through these names is reflective of the Javanese concept of a world-ruler called *prabu murbeng wisesa anyakrawati* (Anderson, 1990, p. 45) which probably Sukarno also subscribed.

In a further development, due to the strong influence of the Javanese concept of power in the late 1950s, Sukarno more often presented himself as a true Javanese ruler rather than as a leader of a democratic republic. When in 1956, Vice President Hatta resigned, for instance, Sukarno did not think of a replacing him with a new Vice President, as in a monarchical system there is no “vice king”. Instead, Sukarno felt comfortable being the sole highest ruler of the land. When in 1963, he was designated “president for life”, he had no objection (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 281-283), although he knew that in a democratic system a leader should be elected periodically and democratically. With the Presidential Decree of July of 1959 he assumed the Prime Ministership, and with that, he became a powerful center and controller of the whole nation (Feith, 1968, pp. 592-593).

Before the ideas of *mandala* and *chakravartin* were fully realized, however, domestic and international political development grew unfavorably against President Sukarno. In mid-1960s, news about the President's deteriorating physical health spread (Adams, 1967, p. 215). The opposing forces of Indonesian politics became increasingly irreconcilable, while at the international level the so-called “cold” war often manifested itself in “hot” and violent conflicts by proxy among non-aligned nations, including Indonesia. From this point everything went downward for the President. Beginning in the second half of 1965 members and alleged-members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) along with members and alleged-members of leftist groups, which had been the loyal supporters of Sukarno (Adams, 1967, pp. 214-215) were imprisoned and massacred. In 1966, Sukarno was compelled to

Table 1. Sukarno and the Implementation of His Understanding of the Javanese Concept of Power

The Period	Personal	Domestic Politics	International Relations
Pre-Proclamation of Independence (1945)	Viewing himself as the future leader of Java, like his royal predecessors.	Viewing colonialism as the enemy of Java.	Viewing the islands other than Java as “foreign” lands that should be included in Java’s political rule.
During the Revolution (1945-1949)	Viewing himself as the future leader of Java and other islands of Nusantara.	Viewing himself not only as the leader of Java, but the liberator of the whole Dutch colonial territory.	Implementing the concept of Mandala and Chakravartin among non-Javanese.
Liberal Democracy (1950-1956)	Willing to share political power with other political leaders.	Viewing himself as the Head of State and Prime Ministers and the heads of government.	Implementing the concept of Mandala and Chakravartin among Asian and African nations.
Guided Democracy (1957-1966)	Concentrating Indonesia’s political power unto himself.	Positioning himself as both the head of state and the head of government, just like a true Javanese ruler.	Extending the concept of Mandala and Chakravartin to members of the United Nations.

surrender most of his power to his future successor. In 1967 he was deposed from his position as president. In 1970, he died as a political prisoner in his own country, although his political views and practices continue to inspire many Indonesians up to this day.

Clearly, in his personal view of himself and his political career, Sukarno was very much influenced by his understanding of the Javanese concept of power. The implementation of such understanding, however, was not static. Instead of being static, it was very dynamic and can easily be observed from his personal life, his conducting of domestic politics as well as his policies pertaining to international relations. The dynamics were particularly well-expressed in how Sukarno responded to the fluctuation of the domestic and international politics, along with the role he intended to play in amidst the fluctuation.

During the period of pre-1945, for instance, in which he worked to eliminate colonial subjugation, Sukarno implemented the Javanese concept of power by viewing himself as the future leader of Java as his royal predecessors were (Sukarno, 1965, p. 19). In domestic politics, he viewed colonialism as an obstacle for the Javanese to have their own government, and therefore had to be ended. With regard to international relations during this period he viewed islands other than Java as “foreign lands” but should be included in the Javanese rule (Sukarno, 1965, p. 148).

In a further development, during the revolu-

tionary period (1945-1949), when Indonesians fought the Dutch who wanted to recolonize Indonesia, Sukarno viewed himself not only as the future leader of Java, but of the whole Nusantara. For this reason, he began to work with political leaders from outside Java. Along this idea he began to implement the concept of *Mandala* and *Chakravartin* in the form of extending his influence among non-Javanese people (Sukarno, 1965, p. 184).

During the period of the Liberal Democracy (1950-1957), Sukarno was personally willing to share political power with others, many of them were non-Javanese. In this period, as President, he was also willing to limit his power only as head of state of the newly independent nation, while letting Prime Ministers to be the heads of government. In his capacity as Indonesia’s head of state, he implemented the concept of *Mandala* and *Chakravartin* among Asian and African nations, as shown in his hosting of the successful Bandung conference in 1955 (Sukarno, 2014, p. 597). Such an implementation of the Javanese concept of power began to change drastically when during the next period of his political career Sukarno began to exercise the Javanese concept of power differently. In response to the unstable political situation of Indonesia, in which the government frequently changed from one to another, he began to concentrate political power unto himself, acting as if he was indeed a truly traditional Javanese ruler. In national politics he positioned himself as Indonesia’s head of state and head of government, by declaring “*Demokrasi*

Terpimpin” or Guided Democracy, in which he was the sole guide or leader of Indonesia (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 278-279). In international relations during this period Sukarno began to extend the concept of *Mandala* and *Chakravartin* not only among Asian and African nations, but also among members of the United Nations (Sukarno, 1965, pp. 304-307).

Despite his strong (albeit dynamic) adherence to the Javanese concept of power, it should be noted that Sukarno was not always consistent in following or implementing it. This was clear, for instance, in his support for the founding of independent Indonesia as a democratic republic. Another example would be his support for and defense of Pancasila, Indonesia’s state ideology (Sukarno, 1965, p. 272). The idea of a republican form of government is certainly alien to the Javanese concept of power as it traditionally promotes monarchical form of government. Yet Sukarno fully supported the idea that the following its proclamation of independence, Indonesia would be a democratic republic, and not a Javanese monarchy. Sukarno also supported and defended, in fact helped formulate, Pancasila although some of its principles are foreign to the traditional Javanese concept of power, such as democracy and social justice.

Based on the above explorations, to the history students, we can explain that to a certain extent traditional concept of power may be used by a leader to function as a political leader. At the same time, since Indonesia is a democratic republic, the leader should adjust the traditional concept with the requirements of the democratic system of government. In the case of a political leader with a Javanese background, he should avoid the temptation of becoming a holder of absolute authority as expected in the Javanese concept of power. Otherwise, as in the case of President Sukarno, the inflexibility in implementing his Javanese-based political views and practices could, as shown by this research, become incompatible with the dynamics of domestic and international politics which would eventually bring unexpected consequences.

CONCLUSION

According to Anderson (1990), there are three main features in the Javanese concept of power: (1) a true ruler or leader should have the symbolic ability to unify and concentrate different aspects of power and should have royal ancestry; (2) in domestic politics, a true ruler should have the power to unify opposing forces within his realm; and (3) in international relations a true ruler should adhere

to the concepts of *mandala* and *chakravartin*. Being a person born in Java and raised in the cultural and traditional Javanese surrounding, Sukarno was deeply influenced by these features of the Javanese concept of power. First, Sukarno understood and liked to present himself as a ruler who was able to unify and to concentrate different aspects of power, from Javanese tradition to Marxism. He also maintained that he had ancestral links with the kings of Java and Bali. Second, he showed that in domestic politics he was able to unify Indonesia’s opposing political forces, especially the nationalists, the religionists, and the communists, while being able to maintain national unity. Third, based on the concepts of *mandala* and *chakravartin*, he showed that he was able to extend his circle of authority and influence on the nations of Asia and Africa while keeping close relations with leaders of the two blocs of the Cold War. In his efforts to implement the three features of the Javanese concept of power, however, Sukarno was far from being static. He was very flexible in implementing them, depending on his response to the dynamics of Indonesia’s domestic politics as well as the dynamics of Indonesia’s relations with other nations at the international level. In some cases, he even consciously deviated from the Javanese concept of power, such as supporting the establishment of Indonesia as a democratic republic and defending the principles of Indonesia’s state ideology, Pancasila.

One of the formative ways to teach history to students concerning character education is encouraging them to learn about prominent figures from Indonesia’s past along with their political views and practices. In teaching about these figures’ political views and practices, we need to put them in the historical and cultural context with which they grew up. By doing so, we will teach the students to learn every historical figure and event within each of their contexts, and not only from a normative or top-down approach. With regard to learning about President Sukarno, we need to encourage the students to study his political views and practices from his historical and cultural background, especially from the Javanese concept of power as shown above.

Further research is required to study how other post-independence political leaders are also being (or not being) influenced by their cultural and traditional aspects of their upbringing. More research is also required to see how these leaders used the cultural and traditional elements of their upbringing to “negotiate” with Western concepts of power as well as with the realities of domestic and

international politics that they were facing.

REFERENCES

- Adams, C. (1967). *My Friend the Dictator* (1st ed.). The Bobbs-Merill Company.
- Agung, I. A. A. G. (1990). *Twenty Years of Indonesian Foreign Relations, 1945-1965* (First). Duta Wacana University Press.
- Anderson, B. R. O. (1990). *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. Cornell University Press.
- Argenti, G. and D. S. I. D. (2018). Soekarno's Political Thinking About Guided Democracy. *Jurnal Politikom Indonesiana*, 3(2), 46–63.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Confino, A. (1997). AHR forum. Collective memory and cultural history: Problems of method. In *American Historical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2171069>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2012). Basics of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.): Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. In *Basics of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.): Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>
- Dahm, B. (1969). *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence* (First). Cornell University Press.
- Feith, H. (1968). *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*. Cornell University Press.
- Hauswedell, P. C. (1973). Sukarno: Radical or Conservative? Indonesian Politics 1964-5. *Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350794>
- Hindley, D. (1962). President Sukarno and the Communists: The Politics of Domestication. *American Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1952793>
- Kartodirdjo, S. (2001). Latar Belakang Sosio-kultural Dunia Kanak-kanak dan Masa Muda Bung Karno. In *Dialog dengan Sejarah: Soekarno Seratus Tahun* (pp. 25–36). Penerbit Kompas.
- Khrushchev, N. (1967). *Khrushchev Remembers*. Bantam.
- Labuschagne, A. (2003). The Qualitative Report Qualitative Research -Airy Fairy or Fundamental? *The Qualitative Report*.
- Michaud, K. E. H., Carlisle, J. E., & Smith, E. R. A. N. (2009). The relationship between cultural values and political ideology, and the role of political knowledge. *Political Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00679.x>
- Modelski, G. (1963). *The New Emerging Forces: Documents on the ideology of Indonesian Foreign Policy*. Research School of Asian Pacific Relations, Australian National University.
- Moertono, S. (1968). *State and Statecraft in Old Java*. Cornell University Press.
- Nunn, N. (2012). Culture and the Historical Process. *Economic History of Developing Regions*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2012.664864>
- Rapley, T. (2011). Doing Conversation, Discourse and Document Analysis. In *Doing Conversation, Discourse and Document Analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208901>
- Shambazy, B. (2001). Dunia Menurut Putra Sang Fajar. In *Dialog dengan Sejarah: Soekarno Seratus Tahun*. Penerbit Kompas.
- Sitamala, A. (2020). INDONESIA AS NON-PERMANENT MEMBER OF UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, GUARDING THE PEACE AND STABILITY IN ASEAN. *Lampung Journal of International Law*. <https://doi.org/10.25041/lajil.v2i2.2037>
- Sukarno. (1960). *Membangun Dunia Kembali*. https://kepastakaan-presiden.perpusnas.go.id/speech/?box=detail&id=41&from_box=list_1XX_245&hlm=1&search_7XX=Soekarno&presiden_id=1&presiden=sukarno Assessed 1/2/ 2021
- Sukarno. (1964). *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi*. Penerbit Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi.
- Sukarno. (1965). *An Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams*. The Bobbs-Merill Company.
- Sukarno. (1985). *Amanat Proklamasi I, 1945-1950*. Inti Idayu Press.
- Sukarno. (2014). *Revolusi Belum Selesai Kumpulan Pidato Presiden Soekarno 30 September 1965-Pelengkap Nawaksara* (B. B. T. Setiyono (Ed.)). Serambi Ilmu Semesta.
- Taylor, A. M. (1965). Sukarno—First United Nations Drop-Out. *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070206502000205>
- Wardaya, B. T. (2007). *Cold War Shadow: United States Policy Toward Indonesia, 1953-1963*. Galangpress.
- Widyatmadja, J. P. and L. A. W. (Ed.). (2002). *Spirituality of Common Future: Asia-Africa Beyond Globalization*. Clear-Cut Publishing & Printing Co.