

JAVANESE GAMELAN MUSIC, ITS PURPOSE AND HUMAN LIFE: CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS AND REFLECTIONS

Prasadiyanto

Abstract

Dalam karawitan Jawa gaya Surakarta dikenal tiga buah pathet pada masing-masing larasnya. Pergantian dari satu pathet ke pathet yang lain menjadikan suasana yang secara progresive semakin 'panas'. Hal ini dapat diamati terutama dalam pertunjukan wayang kulit, dimana pergantian pathet tersebut dapat dikaitkan dengan siklus kehidupan manusia, sedangkan konsep perubahan yang secara progresive tersebut

berbeda dengan konsep yang digunakan dalam musik barat.

Klasifikasi instrumen gamelan Jawa yang berdasarkan fungsi musikalnya dapat dikaitkan dengan kehidupan manusia dan bagaimana manusia menjalani dan mengisi kehidupannya. Cara mengklasifikasi instrumen tersebut sangat berbeda dengan yang digunakan bangsa Cina yang mengkaitkan bahan dengan alam, yaitu iklim dan arah mata angin.

Dalam kehidupan karawitan penggunaan notasi tidaklah begitu penting, apalagi didalamnya tidak terdapat petunjuk garap yang dapat dijadikan panduan bagi pengrawit. Satu-satunya notasi yang digunakan yaitu notasi balungan gending yang masih harus ditafsir lagi oleh pengrawit, terutama untuk instrumen garap. Hal ini berbeda dengan tradisi musik barat yang mana notasi mempunyai peran utama dalam budaya musiknya.

Sajian gending-gending mrabot dapat dikaitkan dengan tahapan-tahapan kehidupan manusia, mulai munculnya kehidupan hingga kematian, termasuk upacara-upacara religiusnya.

Kata-kata kunci : Karawitan Jawa. Hubungan, Siklus.

Gamelan is a metallophone orchestra, and the majority of instruments are percussive. In Java the performance of gamelan music is very commonly associated with human life. From the court to the village people use this music for entertainment, religious traditions, and accompaniments for other performing arts such as dance and puppetry. The following discussion will focus not only on Javanese music, its purpose and function, but also on parallels between Javanese and other musical cultures. I would like to structure this discussion as follows:

1. The changing of *pathet* in Javanese gamelan music and its association with life cycle; comparison with western concept of musical form and design.
 2. Classification of musical instruments in association with stages of life.
 3. Music, a reflection of society - related to use of notation in Java and the west.
 4. The parallel between performance traditions and religion: Java and China.
- I. The changing of *pathet* in Javanese gamelan music and its association with life cycle; comparison with western concepts of musical form and design.

In Javanese gamelan music there are two scales in the tuning system, *slendro* and *pelog*, and from each scale derives three *pathets* (modes). In *slendro* tuning, the modes are *pathet nem*, *pathet sanga* and *pathet manyura*, whereas in *pelog* tuning, there are *pathet lima*, *pathet nem* and *pathet barang*. The modes in the two tuning systems can be paralleled as in figure I.

Figure I

<i>Slendro</i> Tuning	<i>Pelog</i> Tuning
1. <i>Pathet Nem</i>	1. <i>Pathet Lima</i>
2. <i>Pathet Sanga</i>	2. <i>Pathet Nem</i>
3. <i>Pathet Manyura</i>	3. <i>Pathet Barang</i>

In terms of performance, *pathets* are always associated with time, either day or night. A performance begins with *pathet nem* in *slendro* tuning or *pathet lima* in *pelog*, and from this basis the modes move progressively higher in register. The changing of *pathet* in gamelan music performance is commonly associated with the Javanese concept of life, which relates to the three major human duties, and is called the concept of the three (*konsep tigaan*): *Purwa-Madya-Wasana* (Beginning - Middle - End). The concept can be described as follows:

1. *Purwa* is an old Javanese word for beginning, and is associated with the beginning of human life, the birth.
2. *Madya* is also an old Javanese word, and means middle. It is associated with the middle of human life, from maturity to old age.
3. *Wasana* means end, and is associated with the end of human life, death.

The purpose of this concept is to remind people of the origin of human beings and their aims.

In Javanese shadow puppet performance, which use all *pathets*, people always relate the changing *pathet* to human life, because in Javanese, *wayang* means shadow, and therefore it has something to do with the picture of human life from birth to death. The puppeteer, through the puppets, will always remind the audience about life, the origin and the creator, and what to do to fulfil it. The audience view on either side of the screen, and pay attention to both the story and the philosophy, which are delivered by the puppeteer. The changing of *pathet* has an association with the stages of life, and the parallel between the *pathets*, the story and life stages can be seen in figure II.

Figure II

The <i>Pathet</i>	The Story	Life Stages
<i>Nem</i> in <i>slendro</i> tuning <i>Lima</i> in <i>pelog</i> tuning	The setting of the scene	The birth
<i>Sanga</i> in <i>slendro</i> tuning <i>Nem</i> in <i>pelog</i> tuning	The development of the issues	The maturity
<i>Manyura</i> in <i>slendro</i> tuning <i>Barang</i> in <i>pelog</i> tuning	The resolution	The death

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The transitions of *pathet* also follow a rise in tuning from lower to higher. It is a reflection of human life, in sense of that when someone is near to death, his/her spirit is getting unsettled, and the Javanese would call it getting higher, and it is the time to remember the creator, in order to be forgiven all his/her sins.

The idea of changing register progressively is different to western concepts of form, as described by Kivy:

"I will distinguish, for the purposes of this discussion, between two kinds of musical events: what I shall call 'syntactical events' and 'formal events'. By syntactical events I mean those 'small' events that take place within the musical structure. These events are governed by the 'rule' of musical grammar. Some have to do with chord sequences. Some have to do with melodic lines: for example, when a melody goes up with a leap, from one note to another five steps above, it 'should,' 'normally,' then descend step-wise. And some have to do with the manner in which melodic lines can be combined in 'counterpoint': for example, when it is permissible for melodic lines to move in parallel motion, when they must move in opposite direction, what intervals are permissible between them, and so on. Formal events are the large events of musical structures that are governed by the various musical forms. Thus, for example, it is a formal rule or principle that a symphony is to have four movements, the first one fast, sometimes a slow introduction, the second slow and contemplative, the third in a lighter vein, either a minuet (in the classical symphony), or a 'scherzo' (since Beethoven), and the final one fast, usually faster than the first movement, and often in rondo form in the classical period". (Kivy, 2002. pp. 72-73).

It is quite clear that when Kivy discusses musical events, he is referring to the tradition of exploring the relationship between form and content which in western music is usually characterised by generative melodic processes. On the large scale Javanese pieces (as western pieces) are categorised in forms, and the largest form is called *gendhing*, which also means piece. A *gendhing* form contains: *Buka* (introduction); *Merong* (the first section); *Umpak* (a bridge between two sections), and *Inggah* (the second section). This might be compared with principles of formal design in western music, particularly from the classical period to 20th century. In western music, sonata form, for example, is based on underlying formal principle which consists of a two-part tonal structure, articulated in three main sections. The first part of the structure coincides with the first section and is called the 'exposition'. The second part of the structure comprises the remaining two sections, the 'development'

and the 'recapitulation'. Working from the large to the small scale, further Javanese – western parallels can be drawn. In the West a theme is developed from motifs and thematic content and this, to a great extent, defines structure. It is like in Javanese music, where a *kenongan* is developed from *gattras*, and a *gongan* cycle contains several *kenongans*. One of the differences, however, between western and Javanese music lies in interpretation. In Javanese music, for the same *gatra* of *balungan gendhing*, for example, every musician will elaborate the same basic *cengkok* (pattern) differently. However the melodies are not felt to be different if the *kesan* (impression) of the *cengkok* is maintained. See figure III for an example of a '*cengkok gender*' (*gender* pattern) with different interpretations. This example of interpretation if paralleled with Kivy's description would be called small scale. A large scale event, developed from a cumulative build-up of small scale events, is *gongan* cycle. Another example of large-small scale relationship involving interpretation can be found in *sampak* form. To emphasise the movements of the puppets the drummer will play unmetric patterns, and rebel against colotomic structure. To sum up the concept of large and small scale relationship parallels that of the west. The 'syntactical' in the west allows for individual style and interpretation on the part of composers. In Java, the syntactical allows for improvisation from players of *cengkok* in general and from drummers in well-defined contexts, for example, battle scenes.

Figure III.

Balungan:	2	3	2	1
Variation 1:	5 6 5 .	5 6 5 3	6 5 6 3	6 5 6 1
	. . 6 1	2 1 2 .	. 6 5 3 5	6 2 1 6 1
Variation 2:	5 6 5 . 5	. 5 6 5 3	. 6 . 5 6 1	. 6 . 5 6 1
	. . 6 1	2 1 2 6 5	3 5 3 5	6 2 3 2 1
Variation 3:	6 1 6 .	6 1 6 3	6 5 6 1	6 . 6 1
	. . 3 5 6	1 2 . 3	5 6 2 1	6 2 1

The various interpretations will make one performance different another, and attract musicians to keep updating their play.

II. Classification of musical instruments in association with stages of life.

In Javanese music there are several kinds of gamelan ensemble, and each ensemble has its own purpose according to its function. Gamelan *ageng* is the most complete set, and from which the other ensembles derived. Although there are different sets, the functions of the instruments within each ensemble musically can be classified in the same way. According to Supanggih (Supanggih, 1984, pp.6) the classification of Javanese gamelan instruments is as follows:

1. Instruments that play the skeletal melody (*balungan*) are called *balungan* instruments.
2. Instruments that establish the form are called structural instruments.
3. Instruments that elaborate the melody are called *garap* instruments.

The classification of the instruments refers to their musical function and is considered in relation to the layout of the instruments during a performance. Normally the *balungan* instruments are placed in the middle, in between the structural, which are in the back, with the *garap* instruments in front. The drum set, which belongs to *garap*, is placed in the middle. The layout shows us the functions and practically it is the best for Javanese gamelan rehearsal.

The function of the Javanese gamelan instruments in the classification above can be related to human life, particularly the way people to fulfil life. The relation can be described as follows:

1. The *balungan* (skeleton) is the melody played by the instruments in the middle. It is the skeleton of the piece, from which the piece can be recognised. The *balungan* will always exist whenever one piece is being played. In relation to life, the *balungan* is the life itself. The life will be different from one person to the other, and it depends on the way to fulfil it. Someone can be distinguished by his/her life and how he/she fulfils that life.
2. The form is considered to be the type of Javanese piece, from which the punctuations are derived. The form will tell us when to play the structural instruments and therefore the length of the piece can be recognised by the punctuations. In relation to life, the form reflects the stages of life, from birth to death.
3. The *garap* (elaboration) is the way the musicians treat and interpret the skeletal melody with instrumental patterns, in order to

generate the appropriate *rasa* (feeling). The elaborations will be different from one piece to another piece, and will also depend on the purpose of the piece. In relation to life, it is the way for people to fulfil their life. People, having a specific cultural background, will fulfil their life in a different way to people with a different upbringing. We can distinguish the difference in people's lives by the difference in fulfilling their lives.

In Chinese musicology, instruments are also classified in groups, but in a different way. As Kartomi describes: "The sources are unclear about the history of development of *pa yin*, but it is widely believed that in the time of the legendary Emperor Shun (2233 to 2188 BCE) a classification based on the kinds of materials predominantly used in the construction of the various kinds of instruments already existed (Kartomi, 1990, p. 37). Furthermore she describes musical instrument classification in association with nature, in that choice of character was based on the link in the sphere of cosmological thought and ritual between these materials and the seasons, the winds, the abundance of grain, and, by extension, human welfare, wealth, and political power. In China, there are at least two musical instrument classifications, and in one of them, the instruments are classified into four categories: metal, skin, bamboo, and stone. In relation to nature, stone is associated with the west and autumn, silk stringed zither with the south and summer, bamboo pipes with the east and spring, and skin drums with the north and winter. In another classification, the instruments were divided into eight groups according to sources of sound. In Emperor Shun's time, these are believed to have been presented in the following order; instruments made of metal (*chin*), stone (*shih*), silk (*ssu*), bamboo (*chu*), gourd (*p'ao*), clay (*t'u*), leather (*ko*), and wood (*mu*) (Kartomi, 1990, pp. 37-42). It is interesting to compare the classification linked with nature with Javanese taxonomies. In the latter, function is sometimes significant to a point where the name of an instrument, for example, *kenong*, lends its name to the structural unit – *kenongan* – between its strokes. Javanese people never relate the musical instruments to nature, as this level of abstraction is at odds with the emphasis on role and purpose.

In the past, when the classifications were transmitted orally, the Javanese had also another classification, but it was not very popular. They classified the instruments according to the way of playing. Owing to the fact that in Javanese music, the great majority of instruments are percussive, they use the terminology *nabuh* (to beat) to mean play.

Therefore for the bamboo flute and stringed instruments, they would say *ditabuh* (literally, "beaten"), rather than the right words for them, the Javanese would say *nabuh* gamelan in general for playing the gamelan instruments. The classification according to the way of playing would be as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Dijagur</i> (beaten with soft beater) | : gong, <i>kempul</i> . |
| 2. <i>Dithuthuk</i> (beaten with harder beater) | : <i>kenong, bonang, saron, gambang, gender</i> . |
| 3. <i>Dikebuk</i> (beaten with the hands) | : <i>kendang</i> . |
| 4. <i>Dipethik</i> (played with thumb nails) | : <i>siter</i> . |
| 5. <i>Digosok</i> (bowed) | : <i>rebab</i> . |
| 6. <i>Disebul</i> (blown) | : <i>suling</i> . |

Although the classification is not very popular, it does have significance in terms of association with the difficulties of playing, because the beaten instruments, apart from those which use two beaters, are normally easier to play than the other instruments.

III. Music, a reflection of society – related to use of notation in Java and the West.

Traditionally Javanese musicians never use notation in performance. The only notation they ever have is *balungan*. The soft instrument players will interpret the *balungan* with instrumental elaborations, which is called *garap* (treatment, interpretation), and is the key word in Javanese music, in which every player has his/her own way of interpreting or treating the skeletal melody by elaborating the basic instrumental pattern. The situation in terms of the western classical tradition is more complex, as reflected in Cook's discussion in "Music, A Very Short Introduction" chapter IV. On a purely prescriptive level, he notes: "So each notehead represents a separate note, how high or low the note is depends on how high or low on the page the notehead is. The horizontal lines that make up the staff, against which the noteheads are placed, are there to provide easy reference; they involve by stages, reaching their modern form by around 1250" (Cook, 1998, p.58). On the other hand, he also points out that: "Notation conserves music, then, but it conceals as much as it reveals. At the same time, and largely through its particular pattern of concealment and revelation, notation plays a central role in the maintenance and even the definition of musical culture" (Cook, 1998, p.58).

Western musicians seem to have less chance than Javanese to interpret and elaborate notations, because everything is written down, even the tempo, but Cook's observation about concealment cautions against taking too extreme a view as to western attitudes toward notation.

Notation in Javanese tradition, if used at all, would never show the detail of *garap*. The idea of 'reading' from a prescriptive score is completely unknown in Javanese traditional music. Authority, therefore, resides in the players themselves and not in the concept of a 'score', which Cook points out is a blend of the prescriptive, descriptive and symbolic: "I say 'in principle' because in practice it isn't so simple. For one thing, there are various symbolic elements in the notation – elements whose meaning is fixed by convention. (Examples include the different types of notehead and beam used to represent the duration of a note, and the arbitrarily shaped signs that indicate the rests) (Cook, 1998, pp.56).

However there is a similarity between the two traditions, particularly in the matter of interpretation. In the eighteenth-century, when musicians were expected to interpret music in which melody is a principal part of the musical experience. As Cook says: "Eighteenth-century composers sometimes wrote down just the skeleton of what they intended, leaving the performer to flesh it out through figuration and ornamentation" (Cook, 1998, p.60).

The concept of *garap* in Javanese music is a reflection of the hierarchy of Javanese society, in which the leaders lead and are responsible to the members of society. In the music, the elaboration instruments lead the rest of the ensemble. In terms of tempo, the drum is the leader, whereas *rebab*, *bonang* and *gender* are the melodic leaders, and those classified as *ricikan garap ngajeng* (the front elaboration instruments). They work together and use the *gendhing* as a framework. This concept of society is similar to Western music, where conductor is the leader, and the players are the members. They work together as a team and are like an orchestra society, as described by Cook: "As a simple example of what is at issue, consider the classical orchestra. It consists of a team of specialists (violinists, oboists, and so on), all working to a pre-existing blueprint or master plan (the score). Where there are several specialists in the same area, there are identifiable hierarchies and management lines (first and second violins, the leader). Throughout the eighteenth century one of the team members (normally a violinist or harpsichordist) had overall control of the operation, but early the nineteenth century this managerial role developed into a specialist career path

(conductor). Now held accountable for the success or failure of entire operation, the manager acquired an executive status quite distinct from that of the other team members, with a remuneration package to match (Cook, 1998, pp.77-78).

IV. The parallel between performance traditions and religion: Java and China.

The performance of Javanese music is normally put in an order, however the drummer sometimes ignores it to surprise the other players. The common order of Javanese performance will be as follows:

1. *Pathetan*, a short melodic song to establish the *rasa* (feeling) of the *pathet* (mode).
2. The *gendhing*: *Buka*, the introduction to define the piece; *Merong*, a section that has the settled feeling of calm and seriousness; *Inggah*, a section that has a more pleasant and joyful feeling.
3. *Pathetan*, a section to finish with the same feeling as the beginning.

Although the order is quite fixed, it is very common in the performance that the leaders of the ensemble play some different pieces to expand the form without having agreement in advance. The rest of the players then just make a guess about the added pieces, and therefore during the performance, one player may play a different piece to another and some even stop playing, because they do not know what is going on. Whenever they have recognised the piece, they are to be able to join in again. This happens quite often, particularly in *klenengan* (free evening gamelan session), where the audience may join the players. This freedom in performance and also its spontaneity, particularly in *klenengan* sessions strongly reflects Javanese society, in which the members of society freely interpret the leaders' order.

The order of the performance also reflects Javanese way of celebrating the stages of life. The *pathetan* before the *gendhing* is to establish the *pathet*. It is a reflection of a life before the birth. The *gendhing*, which contains several sections with different kinds of *garap* and *rasa*, reflects the life, its stages, and the celebrations. The *pathetan* after the *gendhing* reflects the memorial of the death. Owing to the fact that Javanese people are highly concerned about lifecycle, they treat it as a tradition in a religious way. The traditional way of celebrating the stage of life can be described in the chart below:

1. Before the birth.

Before a baby is born, when the embryo is seven months old, the family would make an offering to thank God, and invite relatives and neighbourhood to announce the age of pregnancy. It is held on an 'odd' date either Wednesday or Saturday before the full moon, and is called *tingkeban*.

2. The life.

The Javanese would be pleased to be surrounded by relatives. They celebrate for their children's lifecycles, in order to invite them. The celebrations will be held as follows:

- *Sepasaran*, when the child is 5 days old of age
- *Selapanan*, when the child is 35 days old of age.
- *Tedhak siten*, when the child first steps on the earth.
- *Supitan* (for male) or *tetesan* (for female) (literally means circumcision), when a child becomes an adult.
- The maturity is symbolized by marriage.

3. The Death

Javanese people are very concerned with the death. When someone dies, the neighbourhood would come and give some help and to show sympathy. The night before the funeral, people will stay to gather the family. This is called *tuguran*. In memorial of the death, the family would have to make offering. The offering will be on the 3rd, 7th, 40th, and 100th days, 1st year, 2nd year, and 3rd year after the death. The last one is the most important because at this time the family is allowed to construct a headstone, or other memorial, on the grave. Later on the family can decide whether or not to come and make an offering in the cemetery once in a year.

Javanese people seem to like stay together, and it makes a very strong relationship within the society, although in practical life, all social relationships are hierarchically ordered in fine nuances of relative status. This is unlike in China, particularly in the past. Chinese society was strictly divided into four classes – the Scholars, who formed the leading class and among whom the nine grades of civil servants were recruited, the peasants, the artisans, and the merchants. Then Mao, one of China's leaders, had his own analysis of Chinese society to add this traditional and functional classification. He subdivided the class, which was for the most numerous according to wealth into agricultural workers, poor peasants, medium-rich peasants and landlords. The society was simply

a collection of "clans" in which all the family cells were subject to the absolute authority of the rich uncle. This was especially with the marriage, which was always arranged by the parents.

In Javanese society, the valuation of religious practice is a part of life, and therefore people often relate their lives to Javanese belief, which they call *kejawen*. It is similar to Chinese society, in which everyday life is permeated through and through with ritual, taboos and superstitious practices. In both cultures, however, people maintain their music, which has a function in many different contexts. Mingyue describes this from the Chinese perspective: "From a sociological point of view, music has a function in many different contexts: (1) as an auditory sensation to express the degree of joyfulness and sadness of human emotions of which are evident in music festivals, weddings, funerals, and for harvesting, etc.; (2) as a manifestation of one's spiritual dedication through Buddhist and Taoist chants, ritual music for ancestral worship and other Confucian rites, etc.; (3) as a form of entertainment, a pleasantry (Mingyue, 1985, pp.18). In terms of function, there seems to be similarities between Javanese and Chinese music. For example, both cultures integrate music into entertainment and religious traditions in such a way as to be inseparable.

Conclusion.

The changing of *pathet* in gamelan music and from this basis, the modes move progressively higher in register. It has an association with the concept of Javanese life, and in the performance, particularly in shadow puppet show, is related to human life and stages of life. The idea of moving progressively is different to western concepts, which are usually characterised by generative melodic processes.

The classification of musical instruments in Javanese music normally refers to function, and can be related to human life and the way to fulfil life. It is very different to the way of classifying musical instruments in China, where the classification is associated with nature.

In Javanese music notation would never show *garap*, and therefore the idea of reading it in the perspective score is unknown. Musicians use *balungan* notation as a framework and treat it with musical elaboration. In the west notation plays a central role in the maintenance and the definition of musical culture.

The order of gamelan music performance is a reflection of Javanese society celebrating the stages of life, from birth to death, and the valuation

of religious practice is a part of life. All social relationships in Javanese society are hierarchically ordered in fine nuances of relative status. It is unlike in China in the past, where the society was strictly divided into four classes: the Scholars, the peasants, the artisans, and the merchants. The similarity between Javanese and Chinese society is that both cultures integrate music into entertainment and religious traditions in such a way as to be inseparable.

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