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## **Culture and Identity in International Relations: Re-Thinking Javanese Value in Contemporary Indonesian Multilateralism Strategy**

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### **Abstrak**

*Keberadaan budaya telah diakui dalam ilmu politik kini. Budaya juga memainkan peran penting dalam pembuatan kebijakan demi pembangunan suatu wilayah atau negara. Tulisan ini akan berfokus pada sejauh mana budaya, terutama budaya lokal diinterpretasikan ke dalam proses pembuatan kebijakan luar negeri. Budaya beserta nilai-nilai dan interpretasinya telah hadir dalam organisasi formal yang anggotanya mengembangkan suatu bentuk kepercayaan, nilai-nilai, hingga pengetahuan bersama untuk menginterpretasikan realitas. Indonesia terkenal dengan identitasnya sebagai salah satu negara yang tetap netral dalam perjalanan kebijakan luar negerinya. Prinsip kebijakan luar negeri mendayung di antara dua karang beberapa mendapati rintangan, terutama pada masa pergeseran sistem unipolar ke multipolar dalam tatanan dunia. Penelitian ini akan menyoroti peran budaya dalam kebijakan luar negeri dengan menginterpretasikan nilai-nilai lokal, khususnya nilai-nilai Jawa yang dilaksanakan oleh kabinet Joko Widodo terutama berkaitan dengan strategi Indonesia di level multilateral. Menggunakan pendekatan konstruktivisme dalam analisa politik luar negeri penelitian ini menemukan bahwa di bawah pemerintahan Presiden Jokowi terdapat upaya untuk menafsirkan kembali nilai-nilai Jawa yang menekankan pada nilai-nilai harmonis (seperti kerukunan dan asertif) dalam menjalankan politik luar negeri.*

*Kata kunci: budaya, kebijakan luar negeri, multilateralisme, Indonesia*

## **Abstract**

The emergence of culture currently being acknowledged in political science. It has played an important role in policy making to the development of a region or country. This paper will focus on how far culture, especially local values, has been interpreted in the decision-making process of foreign policy. Culture and its values and interpretation exists in formal organizations whose members develop a form of shared belief, shared values, and shared knowledge to interpret the reality. Indonesia is famous for its identity to remain neutral as one of the nation's foreign policy blueprint. The long-standing foreign policy of *mendayung antara dua karang* is challenged several times, especially during the shift of the unipolar through multipolar system in world order. This research will highlight the role of culture in foreign policy by interpreting local values, especially Javanese values conducted by President Joko Widodo's cabinet in foreign policy approaches related to G20 chairmanship by Indonesia. By using constructivism approach in foreign policy and non-western approach in international relations, this research found that under President Jokowi's administration there are attempts to re-interpreting Javanese values such as *rukun*, which emphasize on harmonious values in conducting foreign policy.

Keywords: culture, foreign policy, multilateralism, Indonesia

## **Introduction**

Currently, as the world connects, the role of culture is currently overshadowed by the advance of globalization. In the context of International Relations (IR), culture plays significant roles. The emergence of culture currently being acknowledged in political science. Synergies between culture and other policy areas, have risen in international organizations such as UNESCO, and in multipolar levels such as G20 cooperation. In addition, various cultural products also have additional value, which will be useful not only for improving the national economy but also support political orientation and encompassing implementation of state behavior (Saaida, 2023). By that means, the culture value in one country can also be a reflection of how the relationship between countries would have been built.

International relations become the space for countries to connect and relate to global concerns. As the relations become a significant part of countries, the relationships that have been built cannot be destroyed by clash of cultures. As mentioned above, culture plays significant roles in international relations, especially on how to treat countries as to not crossing the boundaries set by the culture of each one country. Culture plays a big role on how the dynamics in international relations set. By this, culture contributes to cooperation,

competition, foreign policy priorities, and shapes the development of international institutions (Saaida, 2023). Cooperation is the key to multilateralism, and culture is the root of the decision making for the foreign policy priorities.

Indonesia is one country which has a long history related to cultural value. As the colonized country, Indonesia has been through colonization by other countries. That adds and shapes the culture value in Indonesia. Defining the culture value in Indonesia cannot be separated with the long history of colonization. In this article will be described how the history of the colonization shapes the culture and how it impacts foreign policy priorities, also the position of Indonesia in multilateral relations.

Starting with the background of the presidents of the Indonesian republic since the independence era, it is defined by the background of their individual. Soekarno, who is known as the founder of Indonesia republic, has a background of Javanese culture where he was born in Surabaya and spent a long period of his childhood in Tulungagung, East Java (Hanna, 2023). Javanese culture has been rooted in every of his life stages and growth ever since that time. Soekarno has adopted the Javanese culture and been influenced by it in his political career, including international relations (Wardaya, 2021). Javanese culture in Indonesia was influenced so much by Soekarno as the leader of Indonesian independence movement and the first president of Indonesia (Hanna, 2023). The Javanese culture also impacts the base in modern Indonesia. The base of Javanese culture, such as collectivism, syncretism, and the desire to maintain harmony became the key to shaping the culture of modern Indonesia (Ponka et al, 2019).

Indonesian leaders then brought this culture to international relations until the era of Jokowi's presidency. The principle of *mendayung di antara dua karang* or known as rowing between the two reefs, has been implemented since the first time it was introduced by the second president of Indonesia, Moh. Hatta. The foreign policy of free-active become the principle of Indonesia foreign policy. This can be seen by how Indonesia actively maintained the ally with Non-Block Alignation (GNB) ever since. The implementation of these principles is the effort of Indonesian presidents to maintain harmony, and not to be a nuisance or enemy for countries in terms of international relations (Muzakki, 2017).

This article will focus on describing how far culture shapes Indonesia political preferences in multilateral sectors, by looking back on historical and political patterns from the legacy of colonial era and presumably Javanese domination as cultural behavior in Indonesia political politics. This article will not clearly distinguish between domestic and international political orientation, rather will focus on how culture is being re-manifested on a multilateral level by observing Indonesian elite behavior through their interpretation of local culture. Hopefully, this article will lead to further discussion on the interpretation of culture into political behavior, especially at the multilateral level in contemporary Indonesian politics.

Several researchers focused on Indonesian based on the interpretation of its cultural values. While this article will be focused on how the culture particularly Javanese value reshaping the Indonesia multilateralism strategy, under Joko Widodo presidency era. The complex assimilation from its region as a result of political, economic and cultural exchange as well as colonization creates a unique mixture of cultural interpretation in political matters.

Even though as a modern, national state position there is no majority and minority policy that is explicitly implemented by the government, as the mandate from the Constitution guarantees the rights of all Indonesian regardless of ethnicity and religious background. Javanese people accounted for roughly one per third of the population of Indonesia, not to mention that this ethnicity lives in a densely settled, irrigated agricultural land (McDivitt et al., 2023). Politically, as major sub-ethnic Javanese people, its culture plays a significant role in domestic and regional politics. Stated by Ponka et al, Javanese society even today is distinguished by a complex system of traditions and customs that are observed with remarkable precision, rigor and great reverence (Ponka et al., 2019, 2171). The syncretic philosophical tradition is another equally important area. Its philosophical categories have absorbed the best from the religious and philosophical systems of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Chinese and Indian teachings and philosophical concepts along with local forms of reality perception (Ponka et al., 2019).

Besides, the role of culture should not be narrowed only in arts, music, paintings and any other fine artistic product. As stated by Munaf et.al, that the relation of culture and politics can be manifested in art, and moreover stated that arts are able to be institutionalized.

(Munaf et al., 2016, 309) Thus in the context of international relations, another medium such as diplomacy is able to be strongly influenced by arts. By including culture in IR in the concept of cultural diplomacy, Munaf et.al also emphasize the role of institutionalized culture through arts in maintaining national interest by creating a more positive way to promote and disseminate Indonesia cultural achievement on an international level.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### *The Politics of Culture in Foreign Policy Analysis*

In contemporary era, especially after the Cold War and the rise of multilateralism power, however, have far more complex implications than previous era Samuel Huntington highly publicized the famous term of “clash of civilization”. analysis draws our attention to an often-ignored aspect of international relations — culture. Today’s emerging powers encompass entire civilizations — some with thousands of years of cultural continuity. Culture is making a comeback as a factor in international relations. And it is not merely through manifestations of chauvinism in nationalist politics but will make an impact through values (Pethiyagoda, 2014).

Christian Reus-Smit in his article also emphasizes the notion of culture in International Relations from the different meanings of peace, war and power from the West and others, from its importance in creating institutionalized strategy in designing a more peaceful international order (Reus-Smit, 2020). The notion of post colonialism sparks when he stated: “For culturalists, all of this spells the end of the modern international order, an order created by the West, for the West, and built upon, and sustained by Western cultural values”. Based on this argument, culture became the medium for institutionalist scholars in IR to contain the politics of culture. Furthermore, Feng explains how culture is often being juxtaposed in the study of international relations and international studies. Even in contemporary research, culture is slowly gaining its influence as one of main factors in IR sub themes of discussion such as diplomacy and foreign policy. The study of how cultural differences affect behavior has been, for the most part, the domain of social sciences other than international relations (Feng, 2023).

How far culture plays a significant role in policy making, especially in international relations studies can be found in Keohane and Goldstein's writing which emphasize the role of ideas from norm and values, including culture. (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993). Ideas influence individuals, groups, organizations, or countries in making policies both at the domestic and international level. Constructivism paved a road in foreign policy analysis by challenging Kissinger rationalism approach in foreign policy, and an attempt to observe more the notion of rationality not just merely about material gain. As mentioned by Guzzini, ideas plays a role as social projector from actors's (state, international organization, society, etc):

*“We move from a theory of instrumental action to one of symbolic action and social recognition. Behavior is understood as a practice informed by the tacit, ritualized, and open rules of recognition in their respective spheres and social fields. Identity is always part of a relation, and that relation is part of wider fields within which we learn to distinguish our- selves by constructing a biography of ourselves (the “vision of itself ”) that narrates identity across time as well as identification with and difference to others.” (Guzzini, 2022).*

### *Conception of Power in Javanese Culture*

The political spectrum among the country's first leaders, from socialists and communists to Islamic traditionalists and other religious leaders and parties, was also varied. Sukarno was largely able to lay this pluralistic model as the basis of a nation and a model of behavior in a society that is interested in seeking agreement in the name of unity and implementing the principle of Indonesia's national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This happened based on his principle to unify the nation within his realm. However, such a vision of Sukarno largely originates in his Javanese roots and the characteristics of Javanese thinking, directly borne by the first president (Wardaya, 2021). Based on Ponka et al (2019) research, there are several main logics of power based on Javanese framework. How the Javanese positioned Javanese power is important to gather holistic understanding with regard to such concepts as power, strength and balance:

- Regarding the Javanese philosophical tradition, the world is filled and maintained with the energy of power (“shakti”), which has a limited constant number in the universe, only its distribution changes

- The Javanese tradition, power is acquired in two ways, by inheritance and by divine endowment (“wahyu”), which has always been considered a gift from above to a commoner for solving difficult situations. Based on this assumption, client-elit and patriotism cannot be generally justified and easily associated with Javanese people. Because in certain condition according to this interpretation, commoners can be “elected” as leader in solving difficult situation
- The ruler, therefore, sacralized his power and, regardless of the name of his position, appears rather not as an official figure vested with powers under the constitution, but as an image, as a vessel of the divine energy of the universe, projecting and accumulating power

Furthermore, based on this logic, according to Ponka: “both elites and grassroots society tried to explain the rise or downfall of their leader by the capability of the leader through the prism of such notions. Thus, one of the central concepts of the Javanese tradition is harmony in striving not to disrupt the distribution of energy and the balance of the world”. This concept even needs further research to strengthen its argument, especially on the eve of the Presidential election in 2024. But one silver lining can be found in colonialism's legacy and the rise of local elites participating in shaping Indonesian politics, Javanese values from its cultural root and interpretation, acknowledge the role of divine power and communality. Amidst this criticism on Javanese values on its syncretic perspective from several civilizations (Hindu, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and local beliefs) it can be sure that the notion of harmony through communal values has its descent from the past through contemporary issues. (Ponka, 2019).

In order to understand how culture in foreign policy making, Goldstein and Keohane highlighted that ideas will influence policy when principles and beliefs that have been embedded in individuals or actors in the international world being internalized in political institutions. Moreover, Goldstein and Keohane also emphasize that interests are not the main reason for a policy. However, there are ideas, but this does not mean that interests are not included. However, this interest remains significant and influences policy. There are 3 types

of beliefs which are included as a tool for analyzing how ideas influence policy. These 3 policies include world views, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs as the basis for seeing an idea in policy (“Rationalist analysis of ideas in foreign policy”). (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, 3-30). This position is supported by Guzzini’s statement which highlighted the role of identity for actor as social projectors to others (“ a vision to itself “)

“Identity is always part of a relation, and that relation is part of wider fields within which we learn to distinguish our- selves by constructing a biography of ourselves (the “vision of itself ”) that nar- rates identity across time as well as identification with and difference to others.”

## **Methods**

This research is conducted by looking for critical-historical culture of Indonesia to analyze how the culture affects the decision making of foreign policy in Indonesia. The research uses the method of desk-library to collect data. The data collection was conducted by collecting the data from secondary resources using scientific articles, reports, books, or news. The analysis was retrieved after the data collection was conducted, and the conclusion obtained with the qualitative methods by writers.

## **Result and Discussion**

From the independence era in 1945 until now, the new Indonesian elite consisted almost completely of the Javanese people. Even Though there is no certain policy which emphasizes further privilege only for specific ethnicities. At the same time, the period of the activity of the first president, Sukarno, can indeed be called the era of ethnic pluralism. Thus, the second man after Sukarno, the vice-president and national hero of Indonesia Mohammad Hatta originated from Minangkabau, as well as communist Tan Malaka, and the Prime Minister Amir Sharifuddin of Batak. After the Soeharto era, only B.J Habibie came from outside Java, who rose as the Vice President of Indonesia. In the 2004 election Jusuf Kalla, politician from South Sulawesi rose to power as Vice President. Currently the incumbent pair, Joko Widodo and KH Ma’ruf Amin comes from Java's majority ethnic. The following subtopic will periodically breakdown the existence and interpretation of Javanese



culture in Indonesia politics from the era of colonization until contemporary era, especially under the era of Joko Widodo Presidency

### *Historical Approach in Understanding the Politic of Culture in Indonesia*

#### *(i) Racial Policy, Slavery: The Devide et Impera Cultural Legacy on Java-dominated Administration*

Indonesia underwent significant political changes which shaped the nation's culture, and its interpretation is continuously evolving through time to time from pre independence era until post Reformasi era. By the time Indonesia achieved its independence in 1945, patriotism and nationalism in the country had spread. After several decades of colonialism, which has different periodical interpretation since each region has its own pace of independence fighting versus by United East Indies Company (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie/VOC*) Indonesia's culture had shifted continuously from different era from when it was ruled by feudal leaders. As multicultural region led by local leader or kingdom before Dutch-occupation (both from the VOC and its succession through United Kingdom of the Netherlands).

The peak of the VOC attempt in colonialism now called Indonesia was undoubtedly at its peak during the Java Wars (*Perang Jawa*). During the course of the 18th century the Dutch United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, abbreviated VOC) had established itself as the dominating economic and political power on Java after the crumbling and collapse of the Mataram empire. Giyanti Treaties in 1755 effectively crumbled the dynasty into smaller regencies and its succession was tightly supervised by Dutch government or civil servants (resident) and led by Governor General. VOC had its decline in the early 1800s from internal and external factors such as the Fourth Anglo- Dutch War.

Internally VOC economic hegemony plantation commodities for the European Market Several domestic wars with local leaders such as the Java War and Aceh War also devastated VOC financial power locally. As the charter of VOC establishment was severely amended, by the end of 1799. Most of the possessions of the former VOC were subsequently occupied by the United Kingdom or the United Kingdom of Netherlands. The valuable economical gain from spices trade and plantation increased Dutch economical power in

mainland Europe. But, behind the Dutch Golden Age and success of Dutch research, development of human philosophy and law, there are enormous human casualties that built plantations in several territories not only in Java but also North Sumatra. Even Though liberalization and Van Deventer politics had been implemented in the early 19 century, widespread racism and slavery occurred in plantations managed by colonial companies (Minasny, 2020).

*(ii) The Rise of Social Liberalism in Colonial Era*

Power shifting in Europe indirectly affected territory which was previously occupied by VOC. Here, Indonesia gained its own heritage of long history of public administrative culture, as well as the rise of Java-centrism heritage. Two notable figures are Dutch administrator Willem H. Daendels and Thomas S. Raffles. The transition from Dutch into British administrators happened as the result of British occupation at Java. The legacy currently found in the administrative pattern for colonial purposes yet still immerse in nowadays bureaucratic system. The local administration is organized by Daendels by dividing Java into districts (also known as residencies), each one headed by a European civil servant - called the resident - who was directly subordinate - and had to report - to the Governor-General in Batavia. (Emmer, 2021) On the other side, Raffles administrative reorganizations meant an increasing intervention in Java's society and economy by foreign powers, which is reflected by the growing number of middle ranked European officials working in the residencies (Indonesia Investments, 2016).

Interpretation of the present and the past context, especially about culture, helps us to understand how independence was retrieved. Culture cannot be understood based on art or culture alone, but can also be used to understand how political decisions were made by political elites at the time and how people at the grassroots level understood them. In the study of political history, for example, the independence of the Indonesian people (formerly known as the Dutch East Indies colony) has shifted from a regional struggle to a common nationalist goal that is independent from the colonialism of the Dutch empire and establishing a strong nationalist foundation (Emmer, 2021).

The implementation of ethical politics at that time gave birth to political elites who understood broader goals than mere regional spirit, amidst the strong pan-Asian ideology,

However, if seen from a different perspective, the positive side of the emergence of these intellectuals also produced new local elites, who although prioritizing the spirit of nationalism, also inevitably carried the idealism of their respective regions. Moreover, Liberal thinking, which was generally adopted in the economic sector, could not be separated from the dominance of the social-liberalism tradition in national politics in the Netherlands. Throughout the 1920s, the liberal party SDAP - Social democratic Workers Party - slowly moved towards a pragmatic, ethical and parliamentary socialism that emphasized the primacy of law, due process, civil liberties and political democracy. This process stopped automatically after the Netherlands was occupied by the Nazi German Government in 1940 (Sluysers, 1977). This liberal and socialist orientation of thought provided an open discussion space for Dutch or other European intellectuals and local educated people who generally received secondary education in the colonies or higher education in Europe. The awareness to fight for classes in the formal sector (laborers, railway service workers, etc.) resulted in the thought of socialism-communism also starting to be of interest to the educated community, especially in industrial and plantation areas in central and eastern Java (Schrevel, & Schwidder, 2016). Socialism thinking was also adopted by Dutch citizens who became financiers and plantation workers who became Dutch parliamentary politicians (some examples such as Henri Hubertus van Kol and Hendricus J. F.M Sneevliet).

In the 1920s, responding to the spirit of nationalism, the Dutch colonial government tried to pacify it by accommodating it in the form of a policy, namely the formation of the *Dewan Rakyat* (Volksraad). The position of the Volksraad and the national dynamics carried out by the Colonial Government, although late, brought new nuances about how the politics of this country should be carried out, although it was still largely centered in Java as the center of the colonial government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in that era. Furthermore, the Dutch colonial government in the interwar era (1920-1938), when compared to the British, or the French, did not have policies that were adaptive to the aspirations of colonial societies regarding the spirit of nationalism sweeping Asia (Sun Yat Sen in China, Jose Ramos Horta in the Spanish Philippines, Mahatma Gandhi in India). (Emmer, 2021) Despite the Volksraad, the colonial government's actions at the time tended to be repressive, exiling colonial intellectuals to remote places (Boven Digoel, Ende,

Bengkulu). Late Dutch colonial governance was an important driver of the construction of regional cultures in Indonesia, and the colonial state's designation of regional cultures became a spatial organizing principle that influenced the nation into the next century. (Jones, 2012).

*(iii) Java-centrism in Post Independence, Old Order and New Order Era*

The concentration of political dialogue in Java, which continues to occur due to political instability after the Second World War, the vacuum of power, the proclamation of independence and the Police Actions (*Politioenele acties*) carried out by the Dutch military and civilian government while the Allied forces as the winner of World War II made the island of Java strategic. This indirectly opened the concentration of political elite discourse on scholars who were ideologically and geopolitically close to Jakarta. This condition also brought dissatisfaction in the era of independence negotiations with the emergence of regional and ideological rebellions after the reformation (PRRI, PKI Rebellion by Muso in Madiun and the South Maluku Republic movement). If viewed from a critical-historical narrative, the RMS Movement led by a young intellectual from Maluku, Dr. Christiaan Robbert Steven Soumokil, can be an example of how secession efforts resulted from differences in interpretation of the implementation of the results of the Konferensi Meja Bundar (KMB) in 1949.

In the early stage of the Indonesian Republic, although it gained support from secular military groups, the people in the national level government were dominated by Javanese ethnic groups. Soekarno had the ideal of uniting the Indonesian nation, and prioritized nationalist unity. But for people in areas outside Java, as stated by Chauvel in Iwarmony (2023) local leaders and elites observed Jakarta's policy as authoritarian and could diminish their status quo (Iwarmony, 2023, 132). Another rebellion in South Maluku was led by Dr. C.R.S. Soumokil was an attempt to escape from the Republic of Indonesia. The propaganda carried out succeeded in inciting members of the former KNIL at that time to revolt and fight for the independence of South Maluku. In the post-independence period, it can be seen that the Republic of Indonesia, led by Soekarno, was still in limbo in terms of its government. The central government was still weak, and then the Dutch added in, who then came back to colonize the Indonesian people. This finding is in accordance with Pemberton's research, it

indicates that the New Order state drew on the constructed tradition of the Javanese courts in order to legitimize itself by presenting its authority as cultural, and that it used ritual to represent Javanese society as inherently stable and ordered (Jones, 2012).

*(iv) Post Reformasi Era: Conservatism and the Rise of Populism*

The Reformation Era (Era Reformasi) government began in 1998 which has brought great changes to Indonesia starting with the fall of President Soeharto' government after 32 years of power followed by the transfer of power to President B.J Habibie and the amendment of the National Constitution. This became part of Indonesia's journey of historical change in ending the authoritarian and repressive New Order era by paving the way for the era of democracy, giving space for freedom of expression, and strong law enforcement in the interests of people's welfare. Compared to the shifting of power from president Soekarno from the following event of 1965 upheaval, the shifting of power in the Reformasi era was relatively successful.

Previously, the new order government had used Pan-Islamism as a political tool to increase support for Muslims both in Indonesia and abroad such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), even encouraging Indonesia to become a member of the UN Security Council with the hope that Indonesia could represent the interests of Muslims in the international world. However, after transitioning to a reform government, the Indonesian government pushed for changes to limit the scope of Global Pan Islamism and increased attention to minority groups. It has brought reforms to changes in religious freedom in Indonesia. With this, the Indonesian government must be more careful in using global Pan-Islamism that is curbing religious freedom but the Indonesian government remains active in various activities in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Indonesians now have the freedom to embrace the religions they believe in, such as Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. The rise of these minority religions has caused a culture shock in Indonesia as it has to learn to coexist with people of different faiths.

*Rukun Concept and Interpretation of Javanese Harmony in Indonesia  
Multilateral Level*

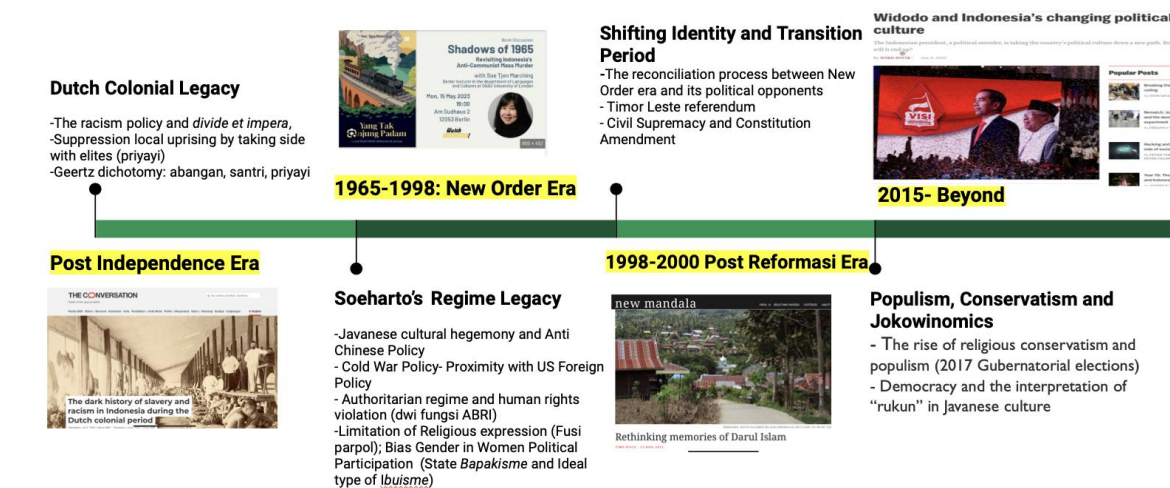
Indonesia is in the position as the top holder of the 2022 G-20 presidency which has control in determining the theme and agenda of the conference. At the same time, Indonesia

highlights the advantages of its local cultural values, especially Javanese values which have appeal, both domestically and internationally. This study raises the concept of soft power which can influence other people through attraction and persuasion, not coercion and payment, with three factors, namely culture, political values, and foreign policy. This concept has been widely used by world leaders, especially in promoting their country's interests and attracting public support for various bilateral and multilateral agendas.

At the multilateral level, such as G-20 Indonesia's chairmanship in G-20 2022: remain neutral amidst critical bilateral relationships in the multilateral framework. In their presidency, Indonesia highlighted the importance of multilateral cooperation by all countries, especially through this G20 summit with the leaders of developing countries. Indonesia has been making an effort to keep on this neutrality position and committed to multilateral cooperation, with the presidency of G20. Indonesia has demonstrated an open dialogue with all countries and approach of consultation and consensus-based decision making in multilateral organization (Wihardja et al, 2022). If the cultural paradigm, especially Javanese notion of harmony being operationalized, the Indonesian elite gesture can be observed from their Symbolic continuation of Indonesia's long-standing foreign policy of neutrality "*mendayung antara dua karang*". This principle then became the root for how Indonesia implemented their foreign policy. The neutrality of Indonesia's foreign policy can be seen by Indonesia's G20 presidency. The open dialogue has been demonstrated by Indonesia, especially with the rise of the conflict of Russia and Ukraine within the period of Indonesia's presidency in G20.

Javanese values, as a major ethnicity in Indonesia, have been afflicted in everyday decision-making processes shown by the Indonesian elite including President Joko Widodo. That strand, based on *rukun* (conflict avoidance norms), has a much more egalitarian foundation for political participation and leadership than its twin, *hormat* (norms of respect). (Sovik, 2020). In accordance with the Javanese notion of harmony, Sovik attached a statement from Franz Magnis-Suseno, a prominent Jesuit priest in Indonesia, who conceptualized a framework for understanding Javanese behavior and attitudes which are all about the preservation of harmony.

In order to visualize more the correlation of culture and its legacy in Indonesian politic this table from several article/ secondary articles are attached:



**Table 1: Culture and its impact on Indonesian Policy**

Post-reformasi for young adults, particularly, do not always as easy as it could be imagined in the past two decades when student-led uprising successfully turned Soeharto from his presidency. Also, it still needs further research to conclude that the notion of communality in Javanese culture is always in line with the implementation in *realpolitik*. Current democratic assessment also found public participation traditionally incorporated in Indonesian community/ A local wisdom of democratic variables, whom emphasizing the role of community and civil society to participate active (“*urun rembug*” in Javanese) are evidently effective to decrease the leader's chance (International IDEA, 2000) to impose authoritarian policy towards society. But further, willingness of both state and civil society as well as private sectors to maximize the harmonic existence in the framework of democracy should be optimized.

*The Mixture of Islam and Javanese Values as Cultural Basis*

Near the end of Joko Widodo presidential era, an unpopular movement has been chosen and surprised many of his followers as well as political scholars on a regional level. The increasing sign of oligarchy and unethical movement recently support the pessimistic notion of democracy stagnancy in Indonesia’s democracy and softly diminish democracy atmosphere. Although Javanese culture highly positions leaders, here we should be more

critical in positioning this condition. Moreover, we should look deeper not just about the interpretation of Javanese culture to blame, but also objectively observe the systemic failure which caused the decline of Indonesia's politics. This tragedy involves a deterministic trap created by a system that is inherently hostile to accountability; what makes it even sadder is that the elite and the people perpetuate that hostility by their own free will (Syailendra & Huliselan, 2022).

Moreover the growth of Islamization through populism actions from the elite, increased polarization among the society after the 2018 Gubernatorial election in Jakarta. Elite machination and dynamic political personification from former President Yudhoyono era to President Joko Widodo increased the chance of growing populism, as stated by Paul Kennedy in Warburton's writings (Warburton, 2020). As stated by Inoguchi's writing on a report related to South-east Asia nations in navigating their foreign policy agenda, Joko Widodo presidency orientation focused on establishing national competitiveness as well as portraying frugal livelihoods of ordinary people and democratization

Globalization and neoliberal competitiveness between Indonesia and its major allies such as the U.S , and China, have forced Joko Widodo to consolidate the infrastructure and industry as well as attract foreign capital without being too bothered by political colors. His choice of Vice President illustrates his dilemma. He had been troubled with the construction of a rapid train system between Jakarta and Bandung, having to choose between a Chinese proposal and a Japanese offer. He had selected the Chinese package before switching to the Japanese offer. Jokowi's foreign policy stance aligns with ASEAN and is, on the whole, similar to Suharto's. At the same time, Jokowi is intent on making Indonesia competitive (Inoguchi, 2021). Although being criticized to put more on political performances, Joko Widodo seemingly put a pragmatic line by taking sides moreover economic development. This is in line with Jefferson Ng's question of Joko Widodo's "kinerja" by highlighting deteriorating democratic fundamentals in his regime (Ng, 2023). A Macbethian tragedy has been posed by scholars when observing Jokowi's movement as sign of democracy declining. The story of Jokowi's ascent resembles that of Macbeth: it was a parable of a person who refused to stay in his allotted place, overturning the natural order of a system (Syailendra, 2022). In more localized version his presence, according to Syailendra's writing also



resemblance the metaphor of *Petruk Dadi Ratu*, a Javanese lore about a king who rose from an ordinary people with no support from political elites, when youth movement criticize the government action related to controversial Law such as Omnibus Law and the narratives of the agenda of election-delay and current issue on Indonesia Presidential elections

## **Conclusion**

The culture has been playing a big role in Indonesia's policies, especially on how Indonesia acted through the international multilateral events. Looking back from the historical patterns from the colonial era, has shown us how Javanese culture dominates the behavior of elite politics. Using the perspectives of culture, Indonesia has implemented cultural values as one of the influences in many other political contexts, especially in multilateral events. The study shows that the founder of Indonesia, Sukarno who rooted from the Javanese culture has shaped the understanding and characteristics of the country. Historically speaking, Indonesia has been through the occurrence which gives us experiences on *Java-centrism*. This study has been reenacted by Indonesia with the interpretation of Javanese harmony in Indonesia multilateral level, namely Indonesia presidency of G20. This shows the Javanese harmony as the basis of Javanese culture that has been rooted in the nation's characteristics. Indonesia has remained neutral in order to maintain peace and harmony in the international system with open dialogue.

The limitations of this research is the needs to design further framework interpretation on how far culture can be cooperated in observing political behavior of actors in international relations (states, elite politics, grassroot movement) whether it is in the scope of diplomacy, multilateral agreement or simply understanding elite preference in determining policy on an international level.

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