Preserving Javanese Culture through Retail Activities in Pasar Beringharjo, Yogyakarta

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Abstract

Being the earliest traditional market in Yogyakarta, the market of Beringharjo, known as Pasar Beringharjo, has had cultural meaning since it was built in 1758. It has been standing near Keraton Nyayogyakarta Hadiningrat as a reflection of the Sultanate’s power and autonomy. The purpose of this paper is to describe the diversity of social-activities taken place in the market through retail activities that embodied the philosophy of Javanese culture. The writings are the result of observing activities that create a distinctive atmosphere, and interviewing communities, which retain their tradition as cultural heritage. The method used for describing the topic is based on Norberg-Schultz’s theory of genius loci. As a conclusion, preserving Pasar Beringharjo as a socio-cultural place will maintain Javanese culture, which in turn, will strengthen the existence of Pasar Beringharjo in Yogyakarta.

Keywords: cultural heritage; social interaction; Pasar Beringharjo; Javanese culture

1. Pasar Beringharjo and Javanese culture

The traditional market Pasar Beringharjo in Yogyakarta has maintained its existence as a public space and accommodated economic activities of the communities. Economic activities in this market began after Keraton Nyayogyakarta Hadiningrat was built in 1758. Although there are several changes in physical appearance, the activities of retail have remained relatively the same. The existence of Pasar Beringharjo has displayed the strong sense of connection and place of Javanese communities. Pasar Beringharjo has reflected Javanese cultural values of the past that has sustained until today. The unique activities inside the market have made Pasar Beringharjo worth to be preserved as a historic place with cultural significance.

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The objective of this paper is to describe the cultural significance of *Pasar Beringharjo* in preserving Javanese culture through retail activities. The methods used in data collection are observation, interview, and photographs documentation. The analysis referred to the phenomenological approach by Christian Norberg-Schulz, which explains image, space, character, and genius loci of a place. The result of the analysis is the identification of the cultural significance of *Pasar Beringharjo*.

1.1. Place of Socio-Cultural Setting

*Pasar Beringharjo* is located at Malioboro Street, the main axis of Yogyakarta. Figure 2a shows that the spatial structure of Yogyakarta is established following the main axis of Javanese ancient town (Santoso 2008:136), which is set up as the straight line from the Palace of Yogyakarta (*Keraton*) to Tugu Monument at Malioboro street. This line formed the cosmological North-South axis, which is oriented toward the Mount Merapi as the sacred place for Javanese people. According to Wiryomartono (1995:13), the emergence of an urban settlement is supported by the existence of governmental, economic, and religious activities. *Pasar Beringharjo* as the center of economic activities has contributed to the formation of urban structure of Yogyakarta. The activities taken place in the building has provided any needs of the city inhabitants, by which founded the important place in the development of urban settlement. People who are coming to the market are from different socio-cultural background and places. The market becomes a melting pot of various people from many places and culture. However all activities in the market have never been distracted from the tradition of Javanese culture. Figure 2b shows the location of *Pasar Beringharjo* in relation to the Palace of Yogyakarta, the Great Mosque, and Malioboro Street. Since its position is near to tourism objects, a great number of visitor come visiting *Pasar Beringharjo* as a destination as well.

1.2. Reflection on Javanese Culture

The system of cultural value consists of concepts that are practiced as a way of life of a society and matters that are valuable in the societal life (Koentjaraningrat, 2004:25). In daily life, the system is applied as the direction for people’s behavior. Geertz, reciting Durkheim (1992:71), emphasized that rites in traditional society has the function of strengthening the social bonds among people. Symbolic rites and mystical legends are necessary to strengthen and maintain the social structure of a community. In the case of Yogyakarta, the Javanese symbolic rituals *Gerebeg* and *Sekaten* become the basis of social structure.

Abimanyu, quoting Pranowo (2013:27), stated that to understand the characteristic of Javanese people, one has to refer the symbolic character of Pandawa Lima in *wayang* performance. Stories in *wayang* performance describe the ideal character of a human as accommodative to other’s opinion, subtle, kind and good to other people. All of these characteristics generates the stereotype of Javanese people (Abimanyu, 2013:28). Javanese people tend to be quiet and accept any differences in opinion. They are known as having polite and delicate personality, introvert and difficult in telling the truth. Most Javanese people are used to speak in idioms that have symbolic meanings. The language used for conversation is stratified according to whom people are talking to. Ethics in communication are strongly emphasized in daily conversation and the respect to elders (*ngajeni*) is a prominent attitude. The Javanese ethic emphasizes also of not talking too much but working hard -*sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe* - (Abimanyu, 2013:32). All of those characteristics have been maintained by Javanese people in order to attain harmonious life and to avoid quarrels among people. The principle of living with harmony in Javanese culture is manifested as [1] accepting oneself with pleasure and without regret (*narimo ing pandum*), [2] mutual co-operation (*gotong royong*), [3] respect to the elders (*ngajeni*), [4] modesty (*andap asor*), and [5] respectful to others.

2. Understanding Cultural Significance of *Pasar Beringharjo*

Norberg-Schulz mentioned that architecture should be represented as means for man’s “existential foothold” (Norberg-Schulz, 1979:3). Existential space is the basic relationship between man and his environment. It concerns with space and character, which represents the differences between orientation and identification. Norberg-Schulz (1979:5) had adopted the philosophy of Heidegger on the concept of dwelling that becomes the purpose of
architecture. Man dwells when he can orientate and identify himself with an environment, in which dwelling implies something more than a shelter. Dwelling is a space with distinct character: *genius loci* or “spirit of place”.

The interaction of natural and man-made space could be explained in the concept of image, space, character, and *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1979:11). The image refers to the overall pre-assumption of the place, and space refers to the three-dimensional organization of elements that build a place. Similar spatial organization may possess different characters depends on the treatment of space-defining elements. Space can be distinguished into two interpretations: a three-dimensional geometry and a perceptual field. Character, on one hand, refers to general comprehensive atmosphere, and, on the other hand, denotes the concrete form and substance of space-defining elements. *Genius loci* are concretized in buildings that gather the properties of a place and bring the place close to a man (Norberg-Schulz, 1979:23).

### 2.1. The image as a cultural and tourism place

There are some well-known traditional markets in Indonesia, such as Pasar Tanah Abang in Jakarta, Pasar Baru in Bandung, Pasar Djohar in Semarang, Pasar Beringharjo in Yogyakarta, Pasar Turi in Surabaya, Pasar Sukowati in Denpasar, and others. Each of these traditional markets has a distinct image which is influenced by its local culture. The image of Yogyakarta as a city of cultural heritage influences the visitor’s image on Pasar Beringharjo. Figure 1 shows the image of *Pasar Beringharjo* as a socio-cultural setting. To comprehend the image of *Pasar Beringharjo*, one should consider three aspects, namely: [1] history, cosmology, and the former structure of Yogyakarta; [2] the role of *Pasar Beringharjo* as a center of trading in Yogyakarta; and [3] cultural significance of its surroundings as a cultural heritage.

![The image of Pasar Beringharjo.](image)

Referring to the former structure of Yogyakarta that is based on Javanese cosmology of north-south axis, the location of *Pasar Beringharjo* is at the east side of the cosmological axis (Figure 2a). According to Javanese cosmology, the urban space of Yogyakarta is classified into the sacred area at the southern part and the profane area at the northern part. To this classification, buildings having sacred function and related to the cosmic power are located at the southern part (Santoso 2008:177). Buildings that have profane characteristics, including *Pasar Beringharjo*, are located at the northern part of *Keraton* (Figure 2a and 2b). *Pasar Beringharjo* as a market has no direct relationship with the concept of power, by which its position is not in adjacent to the symbolic open space *Alun-Alun*.

As a center of economic activities, *Pasar Beringharjo* offers various commodities, such as batik clothes, fabric, convection, jewellery, shoes, sandals, bag, glasses, watches, plastic stuffs, foodstuffs, handicrafts, spices, vegetables, and fruits. These commodities can be purchased in small or large amount (groceries). Its location is near cultural heritage objects: *Keraton*, Fort of Vredeburg, Taman Sari, and Museum Sonobudoyo, by which it also
becomes a tourist destination. The famous commercial Malioboro Street, where it stands, has enhanced the image of *Pasar Beringharjo* as a place for shopping tourism.

![Cosmological concept of Yogyakarta (Heryanto 2011:149); Location of Pasar Beringharjo (Wiryomartono 1995:49).](image1)

2.2. The usage of space

The trading area in *Pasar Beringharjo* is divided into the west and east side, in which different commodities are offered in each side. The west side is the area for selling clothes, fabric, convection, jewelleries, gold, glassware, shoes, and sandals, while the east side is for various kinds of commodities, such as households, handicrafts, spices, foodstuffs, crops, vegetables, fruits, electronic stuffs, spare parts, and building materials. People can find the information on this division in the main entrance.

The main entrance of *Pasar Beringharjo* is located at the west side, where it leads to the main visitor’s circulation route. In front of the main entrance is the parking area for motorcycles and pedicabs (Figure 3). Many pedicabs’ driver offer services of guiding visitor to travel around (figure 4). Many food sellers have settled down in front of the market offering foods; some of them have provided seating place for visitor in that people can have food at that place (figure 5).

![Some vehicles use street as a parking area (a) situation 1; (b) situation 2.](image2)
There are three types of sellers in Pasar Beringharjo. The first are sellers who have permanent stalls (Figure 6), the second are sellers who offer their commodity in non-permanent space (Figure 7), and the third are sellers who offer commodities by walking around. The activity of clothes trading in the market is very busy (Figure 6). The dominating commodities are fashion goods, such as a batik, lurik, garments, shoes, clothes, sandals, and bags.

The art of selling commodities in Pasar Beringharjo is quite distinctive. Sellers do the business in a polite manner, particularly to foreigners. They attract buyer by explaining the making of commodities and establishing a friendly communication with the visitor. Social interactions are set up when sellers are offering their commodities to visitor. As a visitor come entering the stall and showing interest in the commodities, the sellers will gladly explain elaborately about various types of clothes and its related quality and price. They will seduce visitor to fit the clothes and to bargain with the seller. The long discussion and bargaining process creates an informal atmosphere in the market.

Once a deal occurred between buyer and seller, the social relationship expands to a discussion of daily life topics, by which a relationship of supplier and customer is developed. Later on, the buyer can order commodities by phone.
and comes to the market for the payment and social interactions. The traditional art of social interaction in retail activities continues, in that people come to the market in person and pay cash for the commodities.

![Fig. 6. Retail activities at the main circulation (a) situation 1; (b) situation 2.](image)

![Fig. 7. Non-permanent trading area (a) situation 1; (b) situation 2.](image)

2.3. Interpreting the character

Sellers in Pasar Beringharjo do not consider individual gain as the main objective in doing the business. They do not regret nor complain about small profit. They tend to set up cooperation among them in providing commodities for customer. For commodities, which are not provided by a seller, the customer will be referred to colleagues who can provide them. Respect to the elder is expressed through the spoken language during transaction between buyer and seller. The younger person must speak politely in finer expression to the older person without considering oneself as a buyer or seller. Many sellers do the business as a tradition inherited from the parent or grandparent. Seller and buyer respect each other in that bargaining is done in a very subtle art without humiliating one to another. The economic activities occurred in the market are not to be separated from social activities between a seller and buyer, and among sellers and buyers.

2.4. Genius Loci: exploring the “spirit of place”

The building of Pasar Beringharjo is a colonial building with an influence from Dutch architecture. However, it is adapted to the local climate by the provision of cross ventilation system. The large openings on the west and east side are to let the breeze entering the building, by which the room temperature inside the building is much lower.
than at the outside. The combination of Dutch architectural style and local climate has created a unique typology of building that express locality. The “spirit of place” is augmented by activities within the building and its surroundings. Strong tradition in communication and dealing with other people has influenced the way retail activities is carried out. Commodities of traditional Javanese products and artworks has created a distinct atmosphere inside the Pasar Beringharjo, which is not to be found in other markets.

3. Conclusion

The cultural significance of Pasar Beringharjo comprises three aspects, namely [1] the history, cosmology, and former structure of Yogyakarta, [2] the role of a trading center in Yogyakarta; and [3] the environment of cultural heritage that stimulates the market as a tourist destination. In spite of those three aspects, the retail activities reflect the five principles of Javanese culture: [1] to be content and no regret (*narimo ing pandum*), [2] mutual co-operation (*gotong royong*), [3] respect the elder (*ngajeni*), [4] modest (*andap asor*), and [5] respectful to others.

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