



Harmonizing Humanity: Unraveling Javanese Moral Development Through Macapat

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ABSTRACT: The Tembang Macapat, a Javanese literary tradition, intricately weaves together the journey of human growth and development—from the womb to our eventual return to the Divine. Each melodic stanza of the macapat resonates with a unique rhythm, mirroring the multifaceted nature of our existence. In this rich tapestry of Javanese culture, we find echoes of Lawrence Kohlberg's three moral development stages: Pre-Conventional (focused on punishment and self-interest), Conventional (emphasizing social compliance and self-worth), and Post-Conventional (guided by social contracts and universal ethical principles). As humans evolve, they undergo profound transformations—a truth eloquently expressed in the tembang macapat. These verses serve as both a testament to our shared humanity and a call to personal excellence. Through their melodic wisdom, we aspire to become virtuous individuals who have fully blossomed. This paper delves into the exploration of Javanese moral development, anchored in the macapat, as seen through the lens of cultural enthusiasts in Malang. Employing a qualitative research approach with ethnographic methods, we unravel the intricate threads of morality woven into the very fabric of Javanese life.

Keywords: Macapat; Human Development; Moral; Javanese



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INTRODUCTION

The Javanese community stands as one of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia, not only in terms of population but also in the richness of its cultural heritage (Shomad & Adinata, 2020). As of 2023, there were over 60 million individuals identifying themselves with Javanese lineage, attesting to the vastness of this cultural tapestry (Iskandar, 2023). The enormity of the Javanese population is evident in the accumulation of cultural pearls, where Javanese culture transcends mere spectacle and aesthetics to encompass profound teachings and moral values embedded within each cultural expression (Endraswara & Hum, 2013). With over a millennium of history, the Javanese have shaped a unique worldview reflected in their customs, arts, language, and spirituality. In each chapter, we witness how Javanese local wisdom imparts values such as harmony with nature, reverence for ancestors, and the importance of maintaining social bonds. This journey takes us

through different facets of Javanese life, illuminating distinct cultural elements and revealing how these values seamlessly integrate into their daily routines.

Macapat, a cultural legacy of the Javanese, encapsulates both beauty and guidance for the Javanese people (Santosa, 2016). Born out of a deep understanding of the conditions and observations of Javanese society over centuries, Macapat has developed a unique structural framework to elucidate each poetic verse it possesses (Suwardi, 2012). Macapat predates the introduction of writing systems to the Javanese, as evidenced by the absence of physical artifacts containing Macapat, positioning it as an oral heritage immortalized in beautiful and captivating poems (Santosa, 2016).

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, Macapat carries intrinsic content that serves as a guide and classification for human development from a Javanese perspective (Ummah, 2022). The guidance embedded in Macapat represents the essence distilled within Javanese society over hundreds of years (Patta Rapanna, 2016). Moreover, Macapat offers a unique classification of the stages of Javanese societal development, distinct from many established theories of human development (Prabawa & Mukti, 2022). This classification consists of eleven stages of human development, ranging from the inception of an individual into the world to the culmination of their life (Adinugraha & Ratnapuri, 2018), each stage accompanied by advice and wisdom to attain personal ideals for a Javanese individual (Zanky, 2022).

At the genesis of life's symphony, the mijil song resonates—a melodic proclamation of human existence on Earth (Endraswara, 2018). Here, the journey commences, fortified by foundational elements akin to the sturdy roots of a tree. These elements, symbolized by maskumambang, form the bedrock of individual human existence, supporting each step along the path (Oktaviane, 2017). As life unfolds, the soul traverses its intricate passages, guided by the ethereal notes of the pangkur song—a celestial enlightenment marking life's culmination (Muvid, 2019).

Yet, the tale does not end there. Macapat, our poetic guide, weaves the final threads of this human odyssey through two poignant songs: megatruh and pucung (Tunjungwati, 2020). Within their verses and stanzas—uttered in four sacred breaths—we find the essence of existence, distilled into harmonious cadence (Istikomah, 2010).

In this paper we delve into Macapat's lyrical tapestry, unraveling how it delineates and classifies the stages of moral development within the Javanese psyche. Drawing parallels with established theories, we embark on a profound journey—one that illuminates how Javanese individuals infuse meaning into each step of their life until the soul's final departure.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach employing ethnography as its methodological framework. According to Spradley, ethnography is a research method designed to explore and describe human culture both explicitly and implicitly (Hadi, 2021). The primary objective of this approach is to delve deeply into the understanding and experiences of participants concerning macapat songs in the context of their moral development (Nugrahanta et al., 2023). Consequently, participants in this research are required to possess a foundational knowledge and understanding

of moral development within macapat songs, and they should be practitioners and academics actively involved in the study of macapat.

The research is conducted in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. Malang City is selected as the research location due to the diverse and relevant macapat community that it houses, providing an ideal setting for investigating the understanding of moral development within macapat songs. The research duration spans two months. Participant selection follows the key person approach, where individuals with close affiliations to the macapat community are identified and contacted. Subsequently, the snowball technique is employed to extend the participant network, capturing diverse perspectives and experiences related to macapat songs.

The data collection technique employed in this research is snowball sampling. Utilizing the snowball approach, the researcher gathers in-depth data from identified participants and continues to develop the sample by seeking recommendations from participants already engaged in the study. The collected data is then subjected to thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Miles and Huberman ([Sihaloho, 2022](#)). Qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation will be comprehensively analyzed to identify pertinent themes and patterns.

The collected data comprises both primary and secondary data. Primary data is acquired through observation and in-depth interviews, while secondary data is obtained from a literature review on moral development theories in psychology and moral development within macapat songs. Data validity in this research is upheld through source triangulation. Source triangulation involves scrutinizing data from various informants or participants employed in data collection ([Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020](#)). This implies cross-verifying data from multiple sources, including in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the acquired information.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this comprehensive study, we delve into the intricate tapestry of Javanese culture, focusing on the profound influence of macapat. Our exploration involves insights from three distinct participants, each offering a unique perspective on how macapat shapes moral development and harmonizes humanity.

Participant 1: The Heir of Tradition

Our first participant, a direct descendant of a dalang (puppet master) and a sinden (traditional Javanese singer), carries within them a rich legacy. Their veins pulse with the essence of Javanese wisdom, deeply rooted in the concept of kapitayan. From the world of wayang (shadow puppetry) to the pages of Javanese literature, they perceive macapat as more than mere poetry; it is a guiding principle etched into their very being. For this participant, macapat reveals explicit directives and prohibitions that resonate throughout the human journey—from birth to the final breath.

Participant 2: The Pedagogue

Our second participant, the most senior among the trio, approaches macapat through the lens of education. As a dance art lecturer in the literature faculty, they witness the practical application of Javanese macapat in daily life. Through dance and karawitan (traditional Javanese music), macapat becomes a local curriculum for students in schools. Its relevance endures, shaping the moral compass of generations.

Participant 3: The Cultural Ambassador

The third participant, a literary luminary hailing from Yogyakarta and tracing their lineage back to the royal palace, has become a global representative of Javanese culture. Their life story underscores the existence of a profound life development aspect within macapat. As a literature lecturer specializing in performing arts, they bridge cultures and continents, emphasizing the enduring impact of macapat on human character.

In this symphony of voices, macapat emerges not only as poetic expression but as a compass guiding humanity toward virtue and understanding. Join us as we unravel the threads of Javanese moral development, harmonizing tradition and modernity through the timeless verses of macapat.

In the context of Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, we can draw parallels with specific macapat songs:

1. Pre-Conventional Level

At this stage, individuals form their understanding of morality based on punishment and rule orientation. It serves as the bedrock upon which human morality is built. In the world of macapat, several songs resonate with this phase:

Mijil: This song embodies openness, offering advice, and exploring romantic relationships. It reflects the curiosity and vulnerability of early encounters with life's complexities.

Sinom: Sinom illustrates the period of human growth and development. It speaks of encountering new experiences, practicing patience, and extending hospitality—a foundation for understanding the world.

Kinanti: Kinanti narrates the phase of self-discovery, where aspirations are born, and one embarks on a quest to find their identity. It mirrors the exploration and questioning inherent in moral development.

2. Conventional Level

Lawrence's Conventional stage emphasizes an orientation toward exchange and self-interest. In macapat, we find resonance with these aspects through various songs:

Kinanthi: Continuing from the previous stage, Kinanthi remains relevant. It symbolizes the ongoing pursuit of aspirations and the search for identity. Here, the communal fabric of Javanese culture weaves into individual growth.

Asmaradhana: This song delves into love, romance, and the complex emotions that accompany it. It mirrors the conventional understanding of relationships and societal norms.

Gambuh: Gambuh narrates themes of togetherness, tolerance, and brotherhood. It aligns with the idea of societal harmony and shared values.

Dhandhanggula: Derived from the word “dhang-dhang,” meaning hope, this song signifies a phase filled with stakes and expectations for the future. It echoes the conventional pursuit of stability and security.

3. Post-Conventional or Principled Morality Level

In the song Pangkur, we find a sequence of beautiful words packaged to educate students. It aims to impart knowledge and wisdom. The characteristics emerging in the Pangkur phase are passionate, courageous, and powerful. Individuals at this stage enthusiastically strive to transfer their wisdom to the generations below them, embodying the essence of principled morality.

Table 1. The Aspects of Lawrence

ASPECTS OF LAWRENCE	TEMBANG MACAPAT
	PRE-CONVENTIONAL LEVEL:
Stage 1: Punishment and obedience orientation.	Mijil: This song illustrates the openness of presenting advice and about romance.
	Sinom: This song tells the time when humans grow and develop to know new things, patience, and hospitality.
Stage 2: Instrumental-relativist orientation.	Sinom: This song tells the time when humans grow and develop to know new things, patience, and hospitality.
	Kinanthi: This song tells the story of a time of self-discovery, the search for ideals and self-meaning.
	CONVENTIONAL LEVEL
Stage 3: Good boy-nice girl orientation.	Kinanthi: This song tells the story of a time of self-discovery, the search for ideals and self-meaning.
	Asmarandana: The image of this song is love, romance, and also sorrow and sadness because of love.
	Gambuh: It also tells a lot about togetherness, tolerance, and also a sense of brotherhood.
Stage 4: Law and order orientation	Dhandhanggula: Derived from the word dhang- dhang harapan or "hope".
	Gambuh: This song contains messages about wisdom, life advice, brotherhood, tolerance and togetherness.
	Durma: This song describes events of grief, difference, and also lack of something with a firm, violent, and passionate anger character.
POST-CONVENTIONAL LEVEL OR MORALITY PRINCIPLES	

Stage 5: Social contract orientation.	Pangkur: This song contains messages about wisdom, life advice, brotherhood, tolerance and togetherness.
Stage 6: Principle and conscience orientation.	Megatruh: This song contains messages about wisdom, life advice, brotherhood, tolerance and togetherness.
	Pucung: This song tells the story of the time when humans grew and developed to know new things, patience and hospitality.

Moral is the doctrine concerning the goodness or badness of an action or behavior and is related to the character one possesses ([Chaplin, 2006](#)). Morality refers to conduct that aligns with social, legal, or customary rules that regulate behavior ([Nugroho, 2018](#)). Moral can be classified into various types, such as divine morality, ideological and philosophical morality, ethical and moral morality, and disciplinary and legal morality ([Darmadi, 2020](#)). Morality is closely related to values taught by religion and culture ([Ibda, 2012](#)). Moral, as human behavior, is based on awareness that one is bound by the obligation to strive for the good ([Saparuddin, 2019](#)).

Various types of morality exist, with divine morality being defined as everything related to religious or spiritual beliefs, representing a religious and influential aspect on an individual ([Astuti, 2017](#)). Ideological and philosophical morality is associated with national spirit, as well as loyalty and devotion to the nation and state, achieving shared goals simultaneously ([Nurgiansah, 2021](#)). Ethical and moral morality is defined by aspects of courtesy and morality highly esteemed by society in specific regions ([Christianto, 2017](#)). Disciplinary and legal morality relates to regulations in professional conduct and laws applicable in society ([Manggalatung, 2014](#)).

Elizabeth B. Hurlock defines morality as a system of habits, culture, and customs governed by rules oriented toward behavior that has become customary for a culture ([Legi, 2022](#)). According to Maria J. Wantah, morality is closely linked to the ability to determine the true or false, and the good or bad, of a behavior ([Musri, 2022](#)). Russel Swanburg suggests that morality signifies a statement of ideas, thoughts, or concepts related to behavior ([Moh Misbahusani, 2022](#)). According to Imam Sukardi, morality and inherent characteristics are something containing values of goodness highly respected in society based on the shared value system ([Albari, 2022](#)). In summary, morality is the understanding and thoughts of individuals to discern good and bad according to their own testimonies, also based on ideologies and ethics, subsequently implemented in daily behavior ([Sulistiyawan, 2021](#)). From the definitions above, morality can be linked to the moral development theories of Lawrence Kohlberg, Jean Piaget, and Erik Erikson ([Uyun, 2021](#)).

Lawrence Kohlberg asserts that the process of moral reasoning development is a process of role transition, moving towards a more comprehensive, differentiated, and balanced structure compared to the previous one ([Kohlberg, 1964](#)). Kohlberg identifies six stages of moral development, organized into three levels, with each level comprising two stages ([Kuswandi, 2020](#)). Beginning with the Pre-Conventional level, the first stage is the Punishment and Obedience Orientation, followed by the second stage, the Instrumental-Relativist Orientation ([Anggraini, 2018](#)). Progressing to the Conventional level, the third stage is the Good Boy-Nice Girl Orientation, and the fourth stage is the Law and Order Orientation ([Yaqin, 2019](#)). Finally, in the

Post-Conventional or Principled Morality level, there is the fifth stage, the Social Contract Orientation, and the sixth stage, the Principle and Conscience Orientation ([Gunawan, 2022](#)). Thus, the developmental process, according to Lawrence Kohlberg, is based on moral reasoning in human life ([Hasanah, 2020](#)).

In contrast to Kohlberg, Jean Piaget describes the development of moral ideas in children as a gradual process, meaning children create their own moral concepts ([Bernardi, 2021](#)). According to Piaget, the stages of moral growth are divided into three: the Premoral Level (0-5 Years), the Heteronomous Level (4-9 Years), and the Autonomous Level (10 Years and Above) ([Purnama, 2022](#)). Piaget's theory emphasizes the relationship between moral stages and cognitive development and moral behavior ([Latifah, 2017](#)).

Erik Erikson contends that society plays a crucial role in an individual's psychosocial development ([Emiliza, 2019](#)). Erikson outlines eight stages, starting with Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 year) (Ni'mah, 2023). The second stage is Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1-3 years), followed by Initiative vs. Guilt (3-6 years), Industry vs. Inferiority (6-12 years), Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-19 years), Intimacy vs. Isolation (20-25 years), Generativity vs. Stagnation (26-64 years), and Integrity vs. Despair (65 years and above) ([Syahril, 2023](#)). Erikson's theory emphasizes the impact of societal factors on an individual's psychosocial development ([Miller, 1983](#)).

In various cultures, the moral development of humans is depicted and narrated through various expressions, one of which is macapat ([El-Jaquene, 2019](#)). The art of macapat has flourished in several regions in the archipelago, such as Bali, West Java, Madura, and of course, Java itself ([Sadono, 2023](#)). In Bali, Macapat is known as Kidung ([Kurniawan, 2023](#)). For the Sundanese people in West Java, it is known as Macapatan ([Rohmana, 2016](#)). In Madura, it is called Mamaca ([Hidayatullah, 2020](#)). The variety of macapat known in different regions proves that macapat has matured as both literary works and a legacy of moral education ([Rachmadi, 2023](#)).

Macapat contains moral content in its songs as it explains virtues and provides guidance on primary behaviors that individuals should exhibit from birth until approaching death ([Tunjungwati, 2020](#)). Macapat, seen as traditional Javanese poetry, carries values of character education, such as honesty, loyalty, justice, and more ([Ummah, 2022](#)). Macapat also imparts moral reasoning with eleven stages of development, depicted in each song within macapat ([Hardiyan, 2019](#)).

The first stage of development in macapat is depicted by the song Mijil. Mijil, originating from the Javanese word "wijil" meaning 'outside', symbolizes the moment when a person is born into the world from their mother's womb. "Dedalane guna lawan sekti, Kudu andhap asor, wani ngalah dhuwur wekasane, tumungkula yen dipundukani, Ruruh sarwa wasis, Samubarangipun." Following that is the song Sinom, meaning young leaves or 'isih enom' (still young). Macapat Sinom illustrates the beauty of youth, the period of hope, and thoughts filled with optimism. "Punika serat kawula, Katura sira wong kuning, Sapisan salam pandonga, Kapindo takon pawarti, Jare sirarsa laki, Ingsun mung sewu jumurung, Amung ta wekasi wang, Gelang alit mungging driji, Lamun sida aja lali kalih kula" ([Suwardi, 2012](#)).

In the next stage, there is the song Kinanti, originating from the word 'kanthi' or 'tuntun,' meaning guidance. It signifies the need for guidance, "Kukusing dupa kumelun, Ngeningken tyas kang apekik, Kawengku sagung jajahan, Nanging saget angikipi, Sang resi kaneka putra, Kang anjog so

wiyati." Then comes the song Asmaradana, originating from the words "cinta" and "dahana," meaning "romantic fire" or "love." "Lumrah tumrap wong ngaurip, Dumunung sadhengah papan, Tan ngrasa cukup butuhe, Ngenteni rejeki tiba, lamun tanpa makarya, Sengara bisa kepethuk, Kang mangkono bundhelane" ([Prabawa, 2022](#)).

Following that is Gambuh, meaning suitable or mate. "Lan sembah sungkem ipun, Mring Hyang Sukma elinga sireku, Apan titah sadaya mung sadermi, Tan welangsira andhaku, Kabeh kagungan Hyang Manon." Next is the song Dhandhanggula, originating from the words 'dhang-dhang,' meaning hope, or some say it comes from the word 'gegadhangan,' meaning 'idea,' 'desired thought,' or 'hope.' "Sinengkuyung saguning prawali, Janma tuhu sekti mandraguna, Wali sanga nggih arane, Dhihin Syeh Magrib tuhu, Sunan ngampel kang kaping kalih, Tri sunan bonang ika, Sunan giri catur, Syarifudin sunan drajat, Anglenggahi sequence gangsal sayekti, Iku ta warnanira" ([Adinugraha, 2018](#)).

Afterward, there is the song Durma, typically used to depict qualities of anger, rebellion, and a desire for war; "Ayo kanca gugur gunung bebarengan, Aja ana kang mangkir, Amrih kasembadan, Tujuan pembangunan, Pagar apik dalam recik, Latar Gumelar, Wisma asri kaeksi." The macapat maskumbang song narrates the first stage in the journey of human life, "Wong tan manut pitutur wong tuwa ugi, ha nemu duraka, Ing donya tumekeng akhir, tan wurung kasurang-surang." Next is Pangkur, which can be equated with the word 'mungkur,' meaning 'to step back,' "Muwah ing sabarang karya, Ing Prakara gedhe kalawan cilik, Papat iku datan kantung, Kanggo sadina-dina, Lan ing wengi nagara miwah ing dhusun, Kabeh kang padha ambegan, Papat iku nora lali" ([Adinugraha, 2018](#)).

The term "megatruh" comes from the words "megat pisah" and "roh," meaning 'life,' so Megatruh can be interpreted as the separation of the soul from the human body. "Kabeh iku mung manungsa kang pinujul, Marga duwe lahir batin, Jroning urip iku mau, Isi ati kelawan budi, Iku pirantine wong." The macapat from pucung is equated with the last stage in human life, which is in the afterlife. "Ngelmu iku keku kalakone kanthi laku, Lekase lawan kas, Tegese kas nyantosani, Setya budya pangekesing dur angkara" ([Suwardi, 2012](#)).

Within these eleven macapat songs, each possesses its own color, character, and teachings. Macapat distinguishes itself from the three aforementioned moral development theories by explaining human development through stages divided within Javanese wisdom or philosophy. Although these stages have not been scientifically proven, they represent genuine phases in development, providing a new perspective on understanding human development. Javanese society divides the stages of development into unequal chapters of humanity, differing from Western perspectives. This division is observed through the interaction of humans with the natural environment and other humans until intangible elements.

CONCLUSION

Our journey through the intricate world of Javanese moral development, as illuminated by Macapat songs, has been both enlightening and transformative. Let us distill our findings into a symphony of insights:

Aesthetic Value and Moral Substance: Macapat transcends mere poetry; it is a vessel of profound moral content. Beyond its melodic beauty, each verse carries ethical weight, shaping the very fabric

of Javanese culture. The songs—Mijil, Sinom, Kinanti, Asmaradana, Gambuh, Dhandhanggula, Durma, Maskumambang, Pangkur, Megatruh, and Pucung—reveal layers of wisdom, inviting us to explore the human condition.

Journey Across Stages: Macapat mirrors the stages of human existence, from birth to the twilight of life. Like a seasoned traveler, it accompanies us through the milestones of moral growth. Each song whispers secrets of virtue, resilience, and compassion, echoing across generations.

Divergence from External Theories: Macapat defies rigid molds. Its moral development stages may not align neatly with external theories. Instead, they emerge organically from the Javanese soul, shaped by centuries of tradition, storytelling, and introspection.

Paths Unexplored: Our exploration has merely scratched the surface. To enrich our understanding, consider these avenues for further research:

- **Validation and Expansion:** Refine and validate the classification of moral stages within Macapat. Are there hidden nuances waiting to be unveiled?
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Engage in comparative studies. How does Macapat's moral tapestry differ from other cultural threads?
- **Symbolic Depths:** Dive deeper into the symbolic meanings woven into each song. Unearth the buried treasures of wisdom.

In this harmonious blend of tradition and modernity, Macapat beckons us to embrace our shared humanity. As we unravel its verses, let us walk hand in hand, guided by the timeless wisdom of Javanese hearts.

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