

Chapter 18. Sunda¹ – The affirmative life

The mythological worldview of the contemplative site of Nagara Padang, West Java, Indonesia

by Stephanus Djunatan²

Abstract. The study of indigenous myth such as the one at the rocky contemplative site of Nagara Padang, Gunung Padang, West Java can be a useful starting point for the comparative study of human wisdom. After discussing the cultural history setting and providing a sketch of the landscape, I will delineate the teaching myth and its meaning. I will analyze this meaning using an etic approach on the teaching myth. The analysis proposes the account of affirmative life as the indigenous ontological conception of life. This discussion of the comparative studies of human wisdom will conclude by comparing the indigenous ontological conception and the Dao De Ching's ontological conception. An open ending is an invitation to maintain intercultural dialogue.

1. Introduction

In today's era of globalisation, intercultural encounter studies of indigenous mythologies seek to offer a comparative understanding of human civilizations, highlighting the interconnection of contemporary global life. One form in which mythology can manifest itself is as a narrative form depicting how life began and where it is heading, thus illuminating the spiral process of life as locally understood.

This is the kind of mythology that is told at the Sundanese site of Nagara Padang, West Java, and which presumably dates back to the pre-Hindu and Buddhist era in the Indonesian Archipelago. The believed meditating place of the historically-legendary King of the Sundanese kingdom of Galuh, Prabu Premana Dikusumah

¹ The term 'Sunda' used here in the title is not intended to refer to the vast land between Asia and Australia, or to the Sundanese people and culture. Instead the term is used to represent the Sundanese way of thinking and living, and Sundanese religiosity based on the primordial legacy, Hindu-Buddhist and Sufic influence on the people and the culture.

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(circa 6th c. CE)³ and the alleged tomb of the sacred, semi-mythical King of the Sundanese kingdom of Pajajaran (12th c. CE), Prabu Silihwangi, expresses this mythological narrative form of life through 17 stages, 13 of which are marked by huge rocks located in the uninhabited area above the Rawabogo desa.

Each stage has its name and proper meaning which relates to a conception of the cyclic spiral of Life. The spiritual journey begins with a childhood phase, followed by an adulthood phase extolling indigenous noble virtues and principal attitudes for everyday life such as: ‘*silihwangi*’ (intersubjective dignification), ‘*welas asih*’ (compassion), ‘*sapajajaran*’ (equality), ‘*nuhunkeun*’ (gratitude), and ‘*keadilan*’ (justice); and the phase of sagacity in which the self achieves and performs the affirmative life in daily life.

After discussing the meanings informing these respective stages, we depict the indigenous interpretation of ontology implied within such meaning. This mythological narrative of life hinges on the worldview of *Tritangtu*, the triadic structure by which Life is maintained. These tripartite subjects illustrate an ontological account: notably the moment of ‘Becoming-One’.

This indigenous harmony combined with Hinduism / Buddhism and Sufic / Islamic spiritual beliefs defines for each individual a position in *the middle* of the triadic structure, in such a way that each subject emerges as a luminous intermediary of all other subjects. This harmonious spiritual moment of unification in life is the epistemic foundation for the affirmative life expressed in the noble virtues and principal attitude expressed above.

While this sums up the Sunda’s ontological and epistemic narrative form for thinking cosmological interconnectedness, as a final step this paper proposes to apply this Sunda paradigm to the present-day interplay of civilizations in our globalizing world (etic interpretation). This means thinking and implementing mythical and mystical triadic subjects, such as an account of articulate *middle-ness*, intermediary subjects.

For this purpose, the indigenous account will be compared with the perspective offered by the ‘*Dao De Ching*’. Chinese classical wisdom also explains the standpoint of affirmative life. Together these two distinct eastern wisdom traditions offer an invitation for contemporary civilizations to engage themselves in pragmatic connectivity.

2. The culture-historical setting of the contemplative site

The contemplative site Nagara Padang is located at Gunung Padang or Pasir Pamipiran in the southern region of Bandung Area, West Java. Dry padi fields, crops planted side by side the government owned pine plantation, and human settlements surround

³ See Saleh Danasasmita 1984: especially part IV, p. 101-106; Yoseph Iskandar 1997: 140-146.

the contemplative site.⁴ The human settlements or kampongs are under the administration of the Rawabogo village. The Rawabogo Village is the place where guardians of the site live. The village was settled in the 19th century CE⁵ by people who originated from the Regency of Sukapura in the Dutch Colonial era which is known today as the Regency of Tasikmalaya and Ciamis. Rawabogo village is an agricultural community where most people work in the rice fields in addition to poultry breeding and animal husbandry.

Although the policy of decentralisation has split the regency of Bandung into two administrations since 2006, and Gunung Padang is part nowadays of the Regency of West Bandung, the guardians from Rawabogo village still maintain the contemplative site. The guardians often accompany pilgrims while they carry out their respective contemplative journey in the site. During a pilgrimage, the guardian will explain the reasons and the purpose of praying and meditation in the site. Every guardian develops his own version of the teaching story during pilgrimage. These explanations are then passed down by guardians to apprentices for generations. There is no formal apprenticeship as a guardian. The preparation to be a guardian depends on how intensely an apprentice contemplates his life. An older guardian or a local elder will also determine how a guardian-to-be accomplishes the apprenticeship. The elder will convey his teaching story of a pilgrimage of the Nagara Padang to the apprentice who is usually his first born son or his first son-in-law, if he does not have a son. The fact that there are several kinds of teaching stories of Nagara Padang demonstrates the various emic approaches of the site. Observers have to discover for themselves which guardians possesses relatively deep discernment over life and which ones provide coherence between the name of the site and the meaning of the teaching story of the pilgrimage.

For example, one can uncover such coherence in what both Abah Karmo, an elder and the prominent guardian, and Pak Undang, an apprentice of guardianship of the site, have said about their understanding of the connotation of the name of the site. They believe the name of the site, Gunung Padang, is a phrasal riddle. The term 'Gunung' or 'mountain' connotes 'head' or widely interpreted, 'selfhood'. While the term 'Padang' denotes 'bright', 'light' or 'illumination'. Alternatively, 'Padang' also connotes 'illuminating heart.'⁶ One can also perceive 'the illuminating heart' as 'a careful discernment or deliberation', or 'a visionary contemplation'. In short the emic interpretation of the riddle 'Gunung Padang' is 'the illuminating selfhood'.

Both the denotation and the connotation which the guardians produce shows

⁴ The government owned pine forest has been managed and controlled by The Department of Forestry (Perum Perhutani) since 1970.

⁵ According to the village chief of Rawabogo, the first inhabitants were the Islamic mysticism or Sufism. For a discussion of the spread of Islam in West Java, especially in the regency of Sakapura, now Tasikmalaya, see Iip D. Yahya 2006, *cf.* Denys Lombard 1990/2005 vol. 2: 55, 125-128.

⁶ Pak Undang said in the first interview: '*ari gunung luhur, padang nyatana hate urang... Ieu gunung teh luhur, ari padang teh hate nu caang.*' This means: 'Mount is our head, the light is in our illuminating heart' (my translation); see Djunatan 2008: 105.

the fact that both the elder and the apprentice employ their teaching authority. Their authority is obtained from acknowledgements from the surrounding communities and others outside the village and receive a formal certificate signed by *Lurah*, the head of village⁷ of Rawabogo. Because of this authority, I started by observing the teaching narratives of sagacious figures such as Abah Karmo and Pak Undang. They are indispensable figures in the village because people and visitors seek their consultation and follow their advice.

Abah Karmo and Pak Undang live at Kampong Ciparigi which is on the outskirts of Rawabogo Village. Abah Karmo (70) has been a guardian for forty years, since he was approximately 30 years old. His first born son, Bapak Undang (50) has gradually started to take over his father's role as an active guardian. Now that Abah Karmo is beginning to retire, he is accompanying fewer pilgrims to the site. He delegates his authority of teaching to Pak Undang. Pak Undang started his apprenticeship in his youth. He has contemplated his life since he was young with reference to the meaning produced concerning the site. Bapak Undang refers to his method of apprenticeship as '*maca alam*',⁸ which means to contemplate the self which is the inherent part of the Universe. The method of learning and producing meaning has to do with the one '*ngaji badan (diri)*'⁹ or 'the contemplation of selfhood'. These indigenous methods start with an intense reflection and deliberation on daily activities. One could argue that these indigenous methods are sound because they are based on the intuition of the guardians and their respective sensitivity toward daily activities. By performing these methods, the guardians perceive coherent meaning between the occurring event, their effort to produce meaning and their cultural heritage.

The brief description of the Rawabogo village and the role of the main guardian discussed above indicate a human reconstruction of the meaning at the site Nagara Padang (*i.e.* an emic interpretation about the site). Such an emic interpretation provides an indigenous conception of life which included not only the cultural heritage embodied by the inhabitants, but also an explanation of the origin and the purpose of life. The latter implies an ontological world-view in which the presence of the natural world, that is, the heavens and the earth are indispensable for human existence.¹⁰

⁷ *Lurah* or *Kepala Desa* is the government representative which acts as an administrator of a village

⁸ See my interview with Pak Undang, in Djunatan 2008.

⁹ See also the Forum Discussion Group with some apprenticeships as Sunda elders including elders such as Abah Ajat Poerba Sasaka or Ki Laras Maya in Djunatan 2008. Another reference is Straathof 1971: 262-264, 345-350.

¹⁰ The presence of the natural world plays a significant part in the worldview of eastern indigenous philosophy. The idea conveys the contextuality of human knowledge and the idea of a mutual relationship or reciprocity between human beings and the natural world (the heavens and the earth). Laurie Anne Whit, an American philosopher, states:

'It is in this sense that indigenous knowledge of the natural world is presentational. The presence of the natural world is a condition for the very possibility of knowledge. Knowledge is located in the world as much as it is located in a people or a person; it is part of what relates the human and non human. And it is thoroughly contextualized: specific knowledge requires specific places whereby it can be recalled and experienced'. Whit *et al.*, 2001: 16.

The cultural heritage which the inhabitants embody comprises three main settings: the primordial Sunda legacy, the Hindu-Buddhist and the Sufic influence. One should not be too quick to judge the assimilation of these cultural and religious heritages as syncretistic. Indeed these heritages merge to produce an assimilative representation. Nevertheless, the syncretistic representation comes from an outside standpoint, mainly a ‘pure’ religious conviction. This standpoint views as if it were the authentic religious representation without any external influences. Thus, one can claim a syncretistic representation only at an *etic* level of interpretation by observing a gesture of rituals, a displayed symbol, a praying act or any religious object or ceremony.¹¹ One should be critical of the *etic* level of interpretation due to the standpoint of the *emic* one¹². The *emic* level of interpretation produces an explanation of how religious heritage is assimilated. The assimilation implies a particular way of thinking that allows both the distinction and the assimilation of the three religious elements.

In historical records one can trace this unique way of thinking in the form of poetic stories and in the Sundanese narrative poem (*Pantun*). These records were transcribed from traditional story-telling. Story-telling is the way indigenous communities in the West Java have traditionally produced their own story’s of the origin and the purpose of life and their knowledge of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. These short narratives depict an indigenous ontological and epistemological account of Life.

In the case of the contemplative site Nagara Padang at Gunung Padang, the narratives mention Gunung Padang as the indispensable name, not only as the name of a place where heroic figures have meditated or died, but the name also indicates the semiotic meaning of the indigenous ontological and epistemological conceptions. The narratives of Gunung Padang are: *Carita Ciung Wanara*, *Carita Parahyangan*, and *Wawacan Sajarah Galuh*. I will now discuss each of these narratives.

2.1. Carita Ciung Wanara

This is the story of the historical figure *Ciung Wanara* (*Sang Manarah*). The story was sung by story teller Ki Subarma. The transcript of this oral performance was made by Ajip Rosidi, a prominent contemporary Sundanese elder in 1973. Gunung Padang, according to the story, was a meditating place for Prabu Sang Premana Dikusumah, the King of Galuh (Galih Pakuan) around 703 CE. The King decided because of a conflict during his rule¹³ to delegate his throne to the prime minister Mantri

¹¹ For this *etic* interpretation see Clifford Geertz 1969: 5; *cf.* with van Binsbergen 2003: 237, 349 and Straathof 1970: 345-350 concerning his association of ‘*ngaji badan*’ with Catholic teaching of charity and sociality.

¹² For another *etic* approach to Sunda cosmology see Straathof 1970: 260; Wessing 1988:43; 2006: 206-207; *cf.* for a similar *etic* approach to indigenous cosmology on sangomahood in Africa see van Binsbergen 2003: 237, 244.

¹³ This conflict of power occurred because the kingdom of Galuh was a vassal kingdom under determination of the kingdom of Mataram in Central Java see, Atja & Saleh Dana sasmita 1981: 25pp; Dana-sasmita 1984: 94pp; Iskandar 1997: 140-141.

Anom Aria Kebonan Kideng Agung. The king then left the palace and started to meditate at Gunung Padang. He became a Pandita (a Reverend Monk) known as Pandita Ajar Sidik.

The prime minister, however, betrayed the king. He took over the throne and then claimed that he was actually the real Prabu Premana Dikusumah. He also took the real king's wives as his own wives. Meanwhile, Pandita Ajar Sidik came to his wife, Dewi Naga Ningrum, in a dream. Prabu Premana Dikusumah told her that she would bear a son who would rule the Kingdom of Galuh. This prophecy upset the usurper King Premana Dikusumah. The king then called Pandita Ajar Sidik and challenged the monk to prophesy whether his wives would bear sons. In order to make them look pregnant, the fake king hid the night before a wide-mouthed clay pot on Dewi Naga Ningrum's belly and he used a wide rim golden bowl for the other wife Dewi Pangreyep. As soon as the monk Pandita Ajar Sidik prophesied, both ladies actually became pregnant.

The fake king became very upset and ordered his subjects to kill the monk. Yet Pandita was invincible because of his supernatural power. In order to prevent more bloodshed, Pandita offered to die. The event of his death which is connected with Gunung Padang is described in the following verses:¹⁴

Lungkruk Pandita Sidik
Sukma tinggal di kurungan
Biur ngapung ka mega malang
Ku malayang di mega malang
....
Banusan Ajar Sidik
Mulih ka jati mulang ka asal
Kebo mulih pakandangan
Clik ragrag di Nagara Gunung Padang

Salin jisim
Salin jinis
Pandita saparantosna ka Gunung Padang
Salin jisim, jalin jisim
Ngajadi Naga Wiru keur tapa

(Summary translation: the Pandita Ajar Sidik let himself die. His spirit left the body. He became one with the origin of Life. After this, his spirit stayed in Nagara Gunung Padang, where he metamorphosed in to the meditating Dragon of Wiru).

¹⁴ See Rosidi 1973: 52-53.

2.2. Carita Parahyangan

This poetic narrative was compiled and translated into Bahasa Indonesia from old manuscripts in 1981.¹⁵ Some Sundanese scholars claim the story was anonymously written in 1579. The manuscript is a reconstruction of the history of West Java after Islam spread over the region. In this historical reconstruction of West Java, the death of Prabu Premana Dikusumah is told. He received another title in this version, *Pen-deta Sakti Bagawat Sajalajala*, (the Sacred Monk Bagawat Sajalajala). It is told that mercenaries, under the order of Sang Tamperan (the prime minister who took over the throne) tried to kill the Monk.

Sang Tamperan was a nephew of King Sanjaya, the prominent ruler of Sunda Pakuan Kingdom.¹⁶ The nephew was Sanjaya's caretaker for the vassal kingdom of Galuh. The death of the sacred monk had to do with the birth of Ciung Wanara or Sang Manarah, and his step brother Aria Banga. These historical figures were indispensable in the history of Java. The conflict between these brothers was the origin of separation. The Sundanese kingdoms were split into Negeri Sunda which is west of Citarum river, and Negeri Galuh that lies to the east of the river. Both were separate from the rest of Java where the prominent Javanese kingdoms were built.¹⁷

2.3. Wawacan Sajarah Galuh

This poetic narrative is another Islamic anecdote about the Kingdom of Galuh and Gunung Padang, translated into Bahasa in 1983. The origin of Gunung Padang was assimilated into the chronicle of the prophet Noah and the Flood Myth.¹⁸ *Ratu Pusaka*, the ruler of Java, did not obey Noah's prophecy about the coming flood. Before God's inflicted his punishment, the King Ratu Pusaka built Gunung Padang and Gunung Galunggung, which were not covered with water when the flood came. During the flood, the King and his subjects escaped to Gunung Padang, and survived there until the flood subsided.

The story returns again to the origin of the name when it describes the killing of the Monk (Pandita) of Gunung Padang. Again, this story had to do with the birth of Ciung Wanara, and the conflict of Ciung Wanara with his stepbrother Aria Banga which resulted in the division of Sundanese Galuh Kingdom, ruled by Ciung Wanara (Sang Manarah, Sang Surotama) and his descendants, and Negeri Sunda ruled by Aria Banga and his successors. One of Ciung Wanara's successors was the semi-mythical King of Sunda, Prabu Siliwangi, who ruled the Kingdom of Pajajaran.

¹⁵ See Atja & Saleh Danasasmita 1981: iii.

¹⁶ Later, Sanjaya moved to the central Java. He established the (old) Kingdom of Mataram. See Iskandar 1997: 141

¹⁷ See Saleh Danasasmita 1984 on part IV: 112, cf. Iskandar 1997: 155; Sumardjo 2003: 112

¹⁸ See Ekadjati 1981

2.4. Lessons learned from these narratives

- a) Among the lessons learned from these narratives is that Gunung Padang is not only the name for an individual mountain. The Sundanese elders that I interviewed describe three different locations for Gunung Padang. A local journal of Sunda Literature reported one of the locations of Gunung Padang was in Cianjur Regency (west of Bandung).¹⁹ The second location is the one I observed. And the third one allegedly lies in Ciamis Regency (east of Bandung). Some elders are sure that the name Gunung Padang hints of a principal presupposition of the conception of the origin and the purpose of life, and for the indigenous virtues of life.²⁰ This presupposition determines the Sundanese ontological (cosmological) and epistemological accounts, as well as the Sundanese worldview and religious belief.
- b) A mountain is a central symbol for the Sundanese. It symbolizes the idea of *axis mundi*, a sacred mediator between the earth and the heavens.²¹ An *Axis mundi* can be represented either by ancestral spirits, or by certain figures such as a shaman, a storyteller (*tukang pantun*, *dalang*), a guardian, an elder, a king or by natural phenomena such as mountains, trees, rocks, or by certain animals (like a water buffalo, a tiger, a snake, a dragon, a phoenix, and the 'garuda'), or by buildings like a grave, a temple (*candi*), a palace and a house. The *axis mundi* is regarded as sacred in the Indonesian Archipelago and in general in Southeast Asian primordial religiosity.²² Therefore, the Sundanese people believe human beings and the non-human figures communicate with each other through mediation of the *axis mundi*. The indigenous narratives describe Gunung Padang as the meditation place for semi-historical and mythical figures who wanted to contemplate a sagacious life and to maintain sagacious individuality. According to the storytellers, the latter is always associated with supernatural capabilities.
- c) The name 'Gunung Padang' is also associated with the spiritual experience of self-illumination. It refers to the individuals experience who seek self-enlightenment through intense meditation and contemplation of the Sundanese virtues of life. The sagacious selfhood is the personification of the principal virtue of life, that is, intersubjective dignification or *silihwangi*. It is important

¹⁹ See Bachtiar 2006: 33-35.

²⁰ See Forum Group Discussion with Ki Laras Maya, Abah Badra Santana, and Abah Atmajawijaya 27 November 2007.

²¹ Wessing 1988: 43; 2006: 225-226; Sumardjo 2003: 22.

²² For the significance of the idea of the *Axis Mundi* in the Indonesian Archipelago, see Sumardjo 2003: 5 (The *axis mundi* as *Dunia Tengah* or the mediation between human and non-human beings and the Almighty; Rachmat Subagya 1979; the idea of the *axis mundi* in the South East Asian primordial religiosity see Wessing 1988 (on the chthonic forces in the mountains as the *axis mundi*); 1997 (on the Nyai Roro Kidul, the Queen of the South / Indian Ocean); 2006 (on symbolic animals as the *axis mundi* in the South East Asian primordial religiosity).

to note that the idea of self-enlightenment and the achievement of spiritual life, is not exclusively a Sundanese invention. The self-enlightenment of life associated with sagacious selfhood is an ancient conception of the Sage in the Indonesian Archipelago.²³ A teaching narrative as a calling to obtain self-enlightenment also plays a significant role in other faiths including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. It is also indispensable for the Indian and Chinese Sage. In short, the idea of the sagacious selfhood is not unfamiliar; it is a resonance of ancient civilizations.²⁴

2.5. Sketch of the landscape

After depicting the historical and cultural setting, it is also important to provide a geological sketch of the *Nagara Padang* site. The site is located in *Gunung Padang* or *Pasir Pamipiran* (elevation 1224 m., see Fig. 18.1). The mountain is a part of a mountainous area in the south of Bandung. According to geological data, this mountain emerged in the Miocene epoch. This mountain is supposed to be an erupted volcano. On the mountain climatic erosions over the ages have exposed large igneous rock formations.

The igneous rocks are naturally formed in such a way that they look like terraces. With some human intervention these terraces have defined on the mountain into 3 shaped phases of the life cycle and 17 prayer and meditation stages. This intervention indicates the guardians' reconstruction of the natural formation of the rocks. The reconstruction provides the guardians with teaching materials which they employ in order to assist pilgrims while they are performing all prayer and meditation sessions at the site. Fig. 18.2 below renders the topography of phases, terraces, and stages.

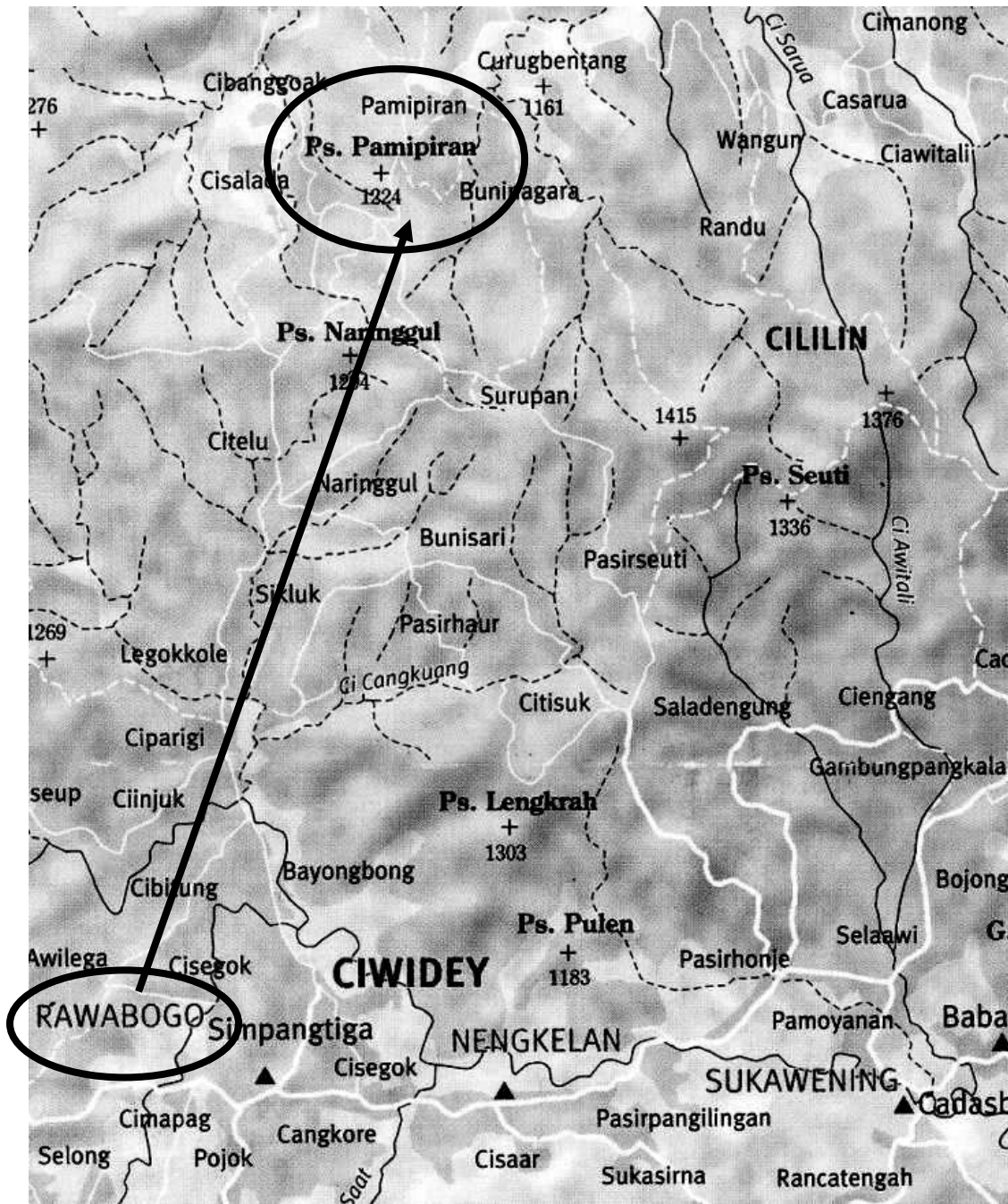
The topography above is equivalent to a complete cyclic life spiral. The cyclic life spiral starts with the initial phase of life: the birth and childhood period (A). This phase consists of a narrative of birth, a memory of parental nurturing and a reflection of formal education. These narratives are a necessary condition for establishing a foundation of humane quality.

The next phase portrays the adult period (B) and connotes the capability to perform daily work, to maintain material belongings, and to show one's competence and skills. The adult period refers to the development of human capabilities such as mind, affection and volition, that of the physical body, and the growing awareness of the spiritual realms. The achievement of adulthood will determine the next phase that is the mature period. According to the Sundanese belief, the period of mature individuality has to do with a process of becoming wise. In this way, sagacious individuality reflects an expression of Sundanese principal virtues in daily life.

²³ Cf. Subagya 1979: 76.

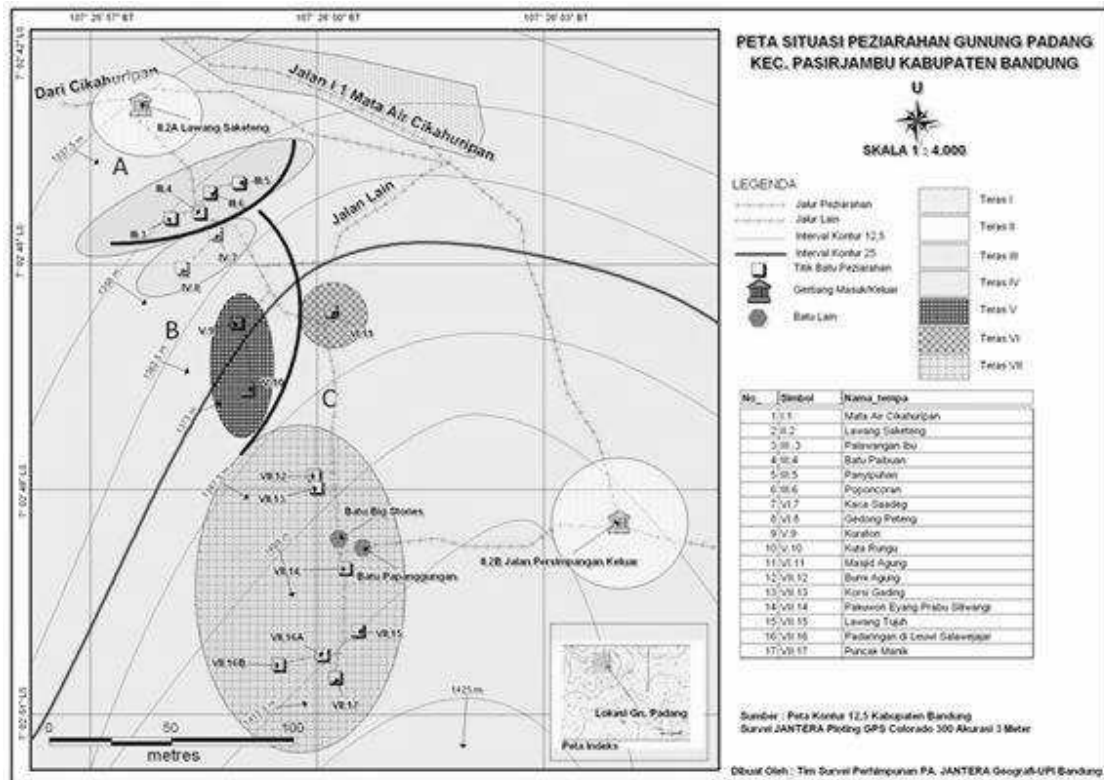
²⁴ The story of the Sage in Chinese tradition, see Fung Yu-Lan 1969 vol. 1; in Indian, Hinduism and Buddhism see Armstrong 1994.: 28-34; Fung Yu-Lan 1969 vol. II; in Islam particularly Sufism, see Simuh 1996; Nurbakhsh 2002; Chittick 2002.

Fig. 18.1: The location of the Site and surroundings.²⁵



²⁵ The map is courtesy of Periplus' Map of Bandung Area, HK 2004.

Fig. 18.2. The topography of the terraces and stages



Legend for Fig 18.2: I to VII: the terraces; A, B, C: Three phases of the cyclic life spiral – the stages for a pilgrim’s praying and meditating session are set out in the following table.

Table 18.1. The stages for a pilgrim’s praying and meditating session

Phase A: the terraces I – III, the Birth and Childhood	
I.1	Cikahuripan (spring of life)
II.2.a.	Lawang Saketeng (The entry Gate of Saketeng)
II.2.b.	Lawang Kadua (The exit Gate)
III.3.	Batu Palawangan Ibu (The rock of the vaginal passage)
III.4.	Batu Paibuan (The rock of Motherhood)
III.5.	Batu Panyipuhan (The rock of formal education)
III.6.	Batu Poponcoran (The rock of the final examination)
Phase B: the terraces IV – V, of the adulthood	
IV.7.	Batu Kaca Saadeg (The rock of self-reflection)
IV.8.	Batu Gedong Peteng (The rock of the dark cave)
V.9.	Batu Karaton (The rock of Royal Palace)
V.10.	Batu Kutarungu (The Rock of the Ear)
Phase C: the terraces VI – VII, the maturity or sagacious individuality	
VI.11.	Masjid Agung (The Mosque of Majesty)
VII.12.	Batu Bumi Agung (The rock of Glorious Earth)

VII.13.	Batu Korsi Gading (The rock of Ivory Throne)
VII.14.	Batu Pakuwon Prabu Siliwangi (The commemorative slab of Prabu Silihwangi)
VII.15.	Batu Lawang Tujuh (The rock of the seven doors)
VII.16.	Batu Padaringan / Leuit Salawe Jajar (The rock of rice barns, or the curved array of 25 rocks)
VII.17.	Puncak Manik (The summit of Light)

The contemplation of the phase of maturity [C] starts with an acknowledgement of the glorious Almighty²⁶ who is the proprietor of the universe. This is self-awareness toward the presentation of the earth and the heavens. This understanding reveals the triadic structure of life or *Tritangtu* which comprises the self (human beings), the earth (the underworld) and the heavens²⁷ (the upperworld). The ternary life structure is the implication of Sunda virtues: ‘*silihwangi*’ (intersubjective dignification), *welas asih* (compassion); and Sunda cardinal principle of life: ‘*silih asuh, silih asih, silih asah*’ (to love, to care and to teach each other), *sapajajaran* (equality), *nunhunkeun* (gratefulness), and *kaadilan* (justice).

It is interesting to discover that the implicit conclusion to this phase of sagacious individuality, is death. One experiences death as a moment of unification: the self becomes one with the earth and the heavens. The moment of unification is described in a Sundanese phrase: ‘*mulang ka jati, mulih ka asal*’.

This phrase connotes ‘a homeward journey’, or going back to the unity with the other two features in the ternary life structure. Nevertheless, ‘the journey home’ initiates a new cyclic process which elevates an individual to a human being of higher quality. The continuation symbolizes a journey into perfection as the Sage. A Sundanese word describes this moment of ‘the becoming-one’ as ‘*ngahiang*’.²⁸ The word literally means ‘disappearing’. Thus, the Sage will ‘disappear’ when one knows the end of one’s life is arriving. This disappearance includes the body. The word connotes death with the completeness of body and soul; both are unified with the earth and the heavens. In Islamic mysticism, the journey home is referred to as ‘*ma’rifat*’.²⁹

One can find these three phases of cyclic life spiral in the form of the Sage’s teaching story at the contemplative site. The teaching story of the Sage places a pilgrim whose intention is to contemplate their respective journey of life as the child.

²⁶ The supernatural authority in Sunda tradition is called ‘*Gusti*’. Such term is less similar with ‘God’ in Judaism since the Almighty does not represent any gender character. Because of this non-gender character, it is better to mention ‘It’ in capital so that the term is close to the emic belief of the supernatural authority. The term ‘*Gusti*’ is abbreviation of ‘*Geus ti ditu na*’ or ‘As it already is’. See Djunatan 2008: 41 *cf.* p. 130 concerning connotation ‘*tengah*’ with ‘Dat MahaKawasa’ or the Almighty.

²⁷ See Sumardjo 2003, 2006; *cf.* with Wessing 1988, 1997.

²⁸ This term articulated by Ki Laras Maya and confirmed in other elders in my interview sessions.

²⁹ *Cf.* Simuh 1996: 92; Nurbakhsh 2002: 2; Chittick 2002: 71.

This child is a future heroic figure who eventually becomes the Sage. Thus, the hero is not Prabu Silihwangi, the prominent Sundanese Sage King who is closely connected to the site. But rather, metaphorically speaking, it can be said to be the pilgrim himself, who emerges to become the Sage King.

In other words, one follows the teaching story of the future sage-child while one is making a pilgrimage at the site. The story of the future sage conveys an idealization of either an individual or a communal life. Such idealization is related with an indigenous belief about the origin and the cosmological structure of life.³⁰ The belief causes the story to be sacred; it is not merely a story of an individual, but the sacred story of the Sage. Therefore, the teaching materials which the guardians communicate are coherent elements of the sacred story of the Sage.

3. The myth of sagacious individuality

A myth can be viewed as either a story of a heroic figure, a sacred tale or merely an imaginative antidote of primitive minds originating from illiterate societies. However, this heroic and sacred story actually depicts a complexity and completeness of human existence both individually and collectively. In other words, in a myth one conceives of the existence of life as a wholeness which includes a complex and complete life cycle.³¹

The story of wholeness implies at least four fundamental inner aspects of human beings. Maria M. Colavito³² lists these four aspects as *maia*, *mythos*, *mimesis* and *logos*. ‘*Maia*’ stands for a dynamic experience of life which portrays an image of the cosmic life out of the chaotic one. ‘*Mythos*’ refers to a capability of oral expression which turns this dynamic experience into a story. ‘*Mimesis*’ is a process of describing communal mores, virtues and noble principles of life as an integral part of the story. The last aspect, ‘*logos*’ puts these community mores, virtues, and principles of life into a common conception regardless of any individual experience. In this sense, mythology is conceived as a complete narrative which theorizes dynamic inner capacities and experiences in which mores, virtues and principles of life are shareable and comprehensible.

If such mores, virtues and principles of life are shareable and comprehensible, myth explains human intention to understand the origin, the meaning and the purpose of life. To tell narratives of a holistic life is to disclose layers or levels of meaning in order to answer the quest for life.³³ These narratives need actors which can be either supra human or non-human representations. These fictitious actors are the projection of a human being individually and collectively. In this sense, mythology provides a

³⁰ See Barnard & Spencer 1998: 386, the entry of ‘Myth and Mythology’.

³¹ Cf. Korab-Karpowicz 2002: 209-210.

³² Cited in de Nicolás 1999: 188-190.

³³ Cf. Korab-Karpowicz 2002: 210.

chance for reflection for each individual so that they can each deliberate on their own journey of life. In other words, the story is about the journey of the self who tries to probe for quests of life.³⁴

Thus the aspects of a myth can be summed up in following points:

- a) A story about how complex and complete a life cycle is.
- b) The presentation of a heroic figure, in the form either of a human being, a non-human figure or a supernatural one, is to explain the fact that the complexities of life with its 'ups and downs' are inevitable. Moreover, the story of the deeds of the heroic figure conveys the meaning of the inevitable cycle of life.
- c) The ultimate purpose of any heroic figure is to attain sagacious individuality. The sagacious individual is concerned with the experience of illumination. In turn, the sagacious individual is the person who *can* answer and resolve the quests for life.
- d) The achievement of sagacious individuality is the central meaning of the myth. It is the achievement of any individual regardless their background. Every person who reads or hears the kind of story about the Sage should be able to articulate the moral, the virtues and the values implied inside the individual.³⁵ The articulation of these morals, virtues and values is a new phase of the life cycle for any sagacious individual.

Together the four aspects of myth above define mythology as:

the narratives of the cyclic life spiral which convey that the meaning of a complexity and completeness of the life cycle is to achieve the sagacious individuality. By contemplating such narratives, each individual can realize his or her own life journey as the attainment of the sagacious individuality.

Thus, I propose that mythology is every human being's story of the sagacious selfhood in which the attainment of the Sage is the ultimate meaning.

I uncovered this type of mythology in the teaching narratives during my visit to the Nagara Padang pilgrimage site. When one begins a pilgrimage there, the guardian of the site always opens the teaching narratives with the phrase:

'Urang mun rek asup ka Nagara Padang...'

(*'If you [someone] want[s] to enter the Nagara Padang site...'* (my translation).

This phrase indicates an invitation for a pilgrim to consider himself or herself to be the actor of the story. In other words, a pilgrim will be a hero who will complete his life journey for sagacious individuality. When a pilgrim realizes this purpose, the guardian will continue reciting instructional materials, such as with the following cita-

³⁴ Cf. Nnoruka 1999: 413.

³⁵ See Barnard & Spencer 1998: the entry 'Myth and Mythology'.

tion.

*'Ayeuna ceuna lamun [urang] rek naék ka gunung padang kudu mawa bakakak hayam. Tah padahal lain bawa bakakak hayam. Éta simbul jeung gambaran. ... Urang téh kudu lir ibarat hayam dibelah dua, dibakakak, saha badan urang, serah sumerah ka saha. Hiji menta pidua ti indung bapa, serah sumerah ka mahakawasa, boga tekad didinya. Geus serah sumerah ka nu Maha Kawasa, lir ibarat hayam dibelah dua, teu daya teu upaya, ujud paparin obah pangersa Gusti.'*³⁶

(My translation: Now, it is said when we want to visit Nagara Padang, we have to bring a long chicken cut in half vertically but unseparated. This is symbolic for us. We have to be like a chicken cut-in-half so that we can resign ourselves, asking who we are. First, we are begging our living and ancestral parents to say a prayer for our intention, so that we realize that we should entrust our live to the Almighty. We are nothing, have no authority against the will of The Almighty; this is the reason we have to submit ourselves to It.³⁷)

The guardian conveys the teaching narrative to the heroic pilgrim whose intention it is to perform prayer and meditating sessions at the site. It is a narrative since the guardians tell a pilgrim what will happen during the pilgrimage at the site. The citation explains a certain disposition of one's mind and physical gestures. This spiritual and physical disposition is the ground for the subsequent teaching sessions during further stages of the pilgrimage.

The other indispensable point is that the guardian's teaching focuses on the contemplation of the self. The ideal disposition of the pilgrimage is to submit and to entrust the self to the living and ancestral 'parents' and to the Almighty. From the standpoint of the Sundanese conception, the 'parents' represent not only the biological father and mother. This metaphor of 'parents' includes the ancestral spirits and the earth. The Sundanese believe that since the beginning of life, every individual was *born* to the earth.³⁸ The metaphor of 'the parents' also connotes a mutual interconnectivity between human beings and the natural world or the heavens and the earth.

4. Mythology as pious teaching: The affirmative life

Two points are needed to clarify before explicating the complete teaching narratives. They are the *emic* level of interpretation, a production of knowledge of the sage performed by the guardian, and the *etic* approach to the *emic* interpretation. For the second point, this paper tries to provide a semiotic categorization of the meaning of the teaching narratives.

³⁶ This citation is Pak Undang's explanation. See Djunatan 2008: 31.

³⁷ The Almighty in the indigenous sense is not characterized by sexual gender. Ki Laras Maya for example, is often called the Almighty Gusti. Yet this word is a puzzle from '*Geus ti dituna*' ('*as it is from the beginning*'). This puzzle means The Almighty embodies neither gender, characters, personae nor physical appearance. It is just the Almighty. Thus I prefer to use 'It' in order to provide closest meaning for this indigenous term. See Djunatan 2008: 95.

³⁸ For the ancient idea of the birth of human beings into the earth see Berezkin, 2008.

Firstly, an interpretation of the guardians at the contemplative site should be analyzed based on the religious and cultural heritage of Java, especially West Java. There are three components of this heritage namely, the pre-Hindu indigenous legacy, the Hindu-Buddhist heritage and the influence of Sufism. These legacies influence the guardians production of the teaching narratives of the Sage and also the guardians interpretation of the natural formations of the rocky stages. In other words, the natural formations of the rocks at the site emerge as the signifier for the guardians so that they can produce the coherent signified of the rocky stages in the form of the teaching narratives.

Secondly, the pilgrim or the observer who performs contemplative acts at the site produces their own meaning of the stages in accordance with the teaching narratives told by the guardians. In other words, the pilgrim or the observer produces the signified of the stages by correlating the natural formation of the stage and the teaching narratives with their own intense prayer and meditation during the pilgrimage.

After clarifying both the guardians' and the pilgrims' standpoint, this explanation applies a semiotic method, namely the triadic models of the sign.³⁹ I decided to employ the method of semiotics in order to analyze Gunung Padang as the sign or the signifier, that is, its natural formation of the stages. While the guardian's teaching narratives, and the meaning produced by the pilgrims in accordance with the teaching narratives, are the signified.

The *etic* approach of the site will provide a comprehensive analysis. For this purpose, I will apply semiotic terms such as:

- The *sign vehicle*, to depict the physical formation of the rocks, especially the name of the rocks and some special marks or forms in some of these rocks. In short these names are also categorized as the signifier of each stage, which will provide the materials for interpretation.
- The *sense*, to explicate the content of the teaching narratives as it is told by the guardians. The guardian's teaching narratives are the signified of the *emic* approach which provides materials for an *etic* interpretation.
- The last is the *referent* or the meaning of the stage which is coherent with the teaching narratives of the sagacious personality and the names or special forms of the stages.⁴⁰ The senses of the stage are the signified, which is produced by both the guardians and the pilgrims / observers.

Based on these semiotic terms, I am about to explain an *etic* approach for each phase and its stages.

³⁹ See Nöth 1995: 89-90, for the correlation of the signifier with the signified based on the view of interpreter the triadic models of the sign in semiotics.

⁴⁰ Nöth 1995: 89.

4.1. The opening ritual ceremonies

The sign vehicle: The fountain of Gunung Padang, Cikahuripan and the entry gate, Lawang Saketeng.

The sense: The purification of the self, and the awareness that the self belongs to the universe and the Almighty.

The referent: A spring usually represents a mother's breast milk or *cai nyusu* in the Sundanese conception. In this sense, water is associated with the idea that a human fetus lives in the liquid of the mother's womb. 'The living in the liquid of the womb' symbolizes that human beings live in a sterile or a pure condition. By accepting the pure beginning of life, every human being should cleanse his / her body ('*diri*') by taking a shower in the fountain. The water of the fountain cleanses the designation and the essence, the body and the soul.

This entry gate or *Gapura* signifies the awareness that an individual has a genealogical bond with other manifestations of life, metaphorically speaking, the heavens and the earth.⁴¹ According to non-western indigenous knowledge, the idea of the genealogical bond is a presupposition of human existence. In this sense, human beings cannot live without such bonds. The awareness of this close relationship is revealed in the guardian's opening prayer. This opening prayer shows that human beings have a correlation with the spirits of the ancestors and the keepers of the earth and the heavens. These non-human figures are the parents. A pilgrim should ask 'the parents' permission and blessing to participate in the pilgrimage.

4.2. The phase of childhood

The sign vehicle: The rock of the vaginal passage, Batu Palawangan Ibu; The rock of the motherhood, Batu Paibuan; The rock of the formal education, Batu Panyipuhan; and The passage of final examination, Batu Poponcoran.

The sense: A description of the birth phase of every child. This phase includes the story of a parental upbringing and nurturing of the child, an early education and a formal one. The initiation of the child into adulthood concludes the childhood phase.

The referent: The birth for every human being is the reason for human presence in this world. Consequently, each individual has something to be revealed during his own life journey. This life duty is 'to perfect life in any kind of its manifestation.' In the Sundanese tradition, this duty is called '*kasampurnaan*'⁴² or 'the perfection.' This Sundanese term connotes human beings' duty to maintain the correlation with 'the others.. The others are described in the following phrase.⁴³

Patalina Diri ka Gusti, Patalina diri ka sasama, Patalina diri ka Alam

This poetic phrase relates how each individual has a constant relationship with

⁴¹ Whitt *et al.* 2001: 4-8.

⁴² Maya 2008: 13.

⁴³ Maya 2008: 16-17.

the Almighty, their fellow human beings and the earth. To fulfill this duty is both to glorify the Almighty and to affirm the existence of all its creatures. In the state of nature, every individual is in charge of maintaining such a relationship. This shall be the ultimate vision and the mission of life for every human being.

The rock of Motherhood represents for each individual parental upbringing and nurturing. How parents bring up their children contributes to their growth, helping improve both physical and mental aspects including the application of the five human senses and the use of cognitive, affective and volitional capabilities. These physical and mental capabilities are the necessary requirements for a mature individual. The child also learns about the virtues in this parental upbringing.

This rock also symbolizes the parental education of the sensitivity and the affirmation of life. The Sundanese believe that a father should be in charge of improving his child's cognitive and technical skills. Thus, the fatherhood connotes with the mind and knowledge of a sagacious individuality ('*elmu pangaji panalar diri, pikeun darajatna*'). A mother will nurture the affective and volitional aspect of children. Motherhood, therefore, has to do with affection and volition ('*elmu pangaji pangulas rasa*⁴⁴ *pikeun martabatna*'). The early education of these mental and psychological aspects is the inevitable task of motherhood. These cognitive, affective and volitional aspects are basic to sagacious individuality.⁴⁵

The rock of the formal education refers to a state school, an Islamic religious boarding school ('*pesantren*'⁴⁶), or an indigenous one (*padepokan*). The educational institutions are the places where children go through the process of the formation of the self. The children can learn not only knowledge and skills and empathy and social sensitivities, but also self-discipline and self-determination to achieve their respective purpose of life. They learn to internalize and to practice virtues. In other words, the children learn to express the basic characteristics of sagacious individuality. Teachers in the formal education can only persuade a child so that this young boy or girl is willing to apply what has been learned in school.

The passage of the final examination concludes the childhood phase. If an individual can pass a final examination it means he / she is ready to enter the next phase, the adult one. This higher category connotes a readiness of each individual to express his own competence, skills and to learn more how to apply the virtues of life in daily activities.

4.3. The phase of adulthood

The sign vehicle: The rocks of self-awareness (Batu Kaca Saadeg), The rocks of the dark cave (Batu Gedong Peteng), The rocks of the palace (Batu Karaton), and The

⁴⁴ The Sundanese lexicon defines 'Rasa' as the capability of human senses, as the mental and rational perception or judgment (*budi, jiwa*), intuition, hope (*asa*), the memorizing capacity (*ras*). See Danadibrata 2006.

⁴⁵ Maya 2008: 30-31.

⁴⁶ Of *Pesantren* or Islamic Seminary cf. Geertz 1969: 177-179.

rocks of ear (Batu Kuta rungu).

The sense: a child growing-up begins to show competence and skills in daily activities. A grown-up individual someday will possess material belongings and achieve a career. Having a position he or she will exercise power to manage others. To have a career and to exercise a power means that a grown-up individual learns more intensely the expression of the principal virtues of life, such as charity (*amal ibadah*), and reciprocal caring, loving, teaching (*silih asuh, silih asih, silih asah*). If the child growing-up realizes that ability and the skills, material belongings, status and power are the duty and the expression of an affirmative life, then he or she should begin the phase contemplating the future and self-perseverance in order to be able to express duty in ones daily chores.

The referent: the rock of self-awareness signifies the invitation of the grown-up children to have their respective specialized vision and mission of life. This self-awareness tries to answer the quests of life: what is the purpose of my life? What do I want to do to accomplish my duty of glorification and dignification of the heavens, the earth, and human beings? How do I realize this duty in my daily chores?

The answers to these questions are uncovered by contemplating one's current psychological and spiritual condition. This means that the quests of life should be responded to right then and there. This response reveals the Sundanese paradigm of the contextuality of the spatial and temporal dimension of existence. The result is affirmation in every daily occurrence.

The rock of the dark cave symbolizes a hard or difficult situation. The difficult situation occurs because the grown-up individual has nothing to support himself or herself. The grown-up individual should overcome this by working hard. He / she should apply his / her competence and skills to an occupation and adopt a career otherwise nothing will offer support to his / her life. To have an occupation in this sense is to have a 'bright' individual life.

Thus every young adult should fulfill his / her duty in accordance with his / her career in life., It is questionable how this duty will be accomplished without such a career. To have a career, however, is not only to support one's own life but also to assist others. The assistance of the others means the expression of the virtue of charity (*amal ibadah*) and reciprocal nurturing, loving and teaching (*silih asuh, silih asih, silih asah*). In other words, to supply necessities and to assist other people and other creatures is to fulfill the duty of pursuing an affirmative life.

The rock of the royal palace characterizes the embodiment of power. In order to fulfill ones duty, there is a presumption of power of humanity where individuals supply their own necessities and the necessities of others. In short, an individual gains sense of authority from their own career. The embodiment of authority strengthens the individual to express the virtue of charity and reciprocal nurturing, loving and teaching. The Sundanese people against the idea that authority can be used to dominate events to subordinate others.

In order to prevent the negative application of authority, while growing-up the child should listen to his conscience. The rock of ear connotes the firm conscience of

an individual and the individuals self-determination to follow the path of the duty of an affirmative life. The Sundanese people believe that is through the conscience that the Almighty speaks. The child growing up should not be easily distracted from the pathway which she or he decides to walk on. A young adult should only listen to the advice of his / her conscience. He / she should not easily believe to useless opinions, news, and gossip which lead one away from the duty of existence.

Sundanese elders highly recommend listening to and acting according to the advice of the conscience. This ancestral sagacity meets Sufism. The idea that the Almighty speaks through human conscience corresponds to Islamic mysticism.⁴⁷ Besides this sagacious characteristic, Sundanese wisdom also encourages the individual to express the duty of the affirmative life through human senses.⁴⁸ The two important human senses in this case are sight and hearing. Both senses are the way in for our thought and consideration, our affection and volition. What one sees and hears will influence their responses. Thus, a careful discernment of external information helps us to manage our life. The Sundanese word for self-discernment is '*eling*' or '*pepel-ing*'.⁴⁹ The word is an application of the capability of '*budi*', the conscience, and '*akal*', the mind, in order to prevent any negative effects from external influence.

4.4. The phase of the sage

The sign vehicle: The Mosque of Majesty (Masjid Agung), The rock of glorious earth (Batu Bumi Agung), The rock of the ivory throne (Batu Kursi Gading), The rock of Eyang Prabu Silihwangi (Pakuwon Eyang Prabu Silihwangi), The rock of the seven doors (Batu Lawang Tujuh), The rock of the rice barn or the curved array of the 25 prophets (Batu Padaringan), and The rock of the summit of the light (Puncak Manik).

There is a carving of *kopiah* (the Indonesian Moslem's rimless cap) on a leaning rock slab. The guardians always guide a pilgrim to perform a resignation prayer as a sign of self-entrustment to the Almighty. At the monument of the Eyang Prabu Silihwangi, a pilgrim will find a monument (a small *lingga*) with a carving of a thumb on the top of it. The thumb is associated with the name Prabu Silihwangi. The name refers to the way in which one might show appreciation to someone. To give a thumb means to respect and to honor that person.

The sense: While growing up the child will realize the glory of the Almighty as he / she enters the phase of the sage. This realization leads him or her to acknowledge the idea that the Almighty is the proprietor of the heavens and the earth. This is a self awareness that human beings are an inherent feature in the triadic structure of life, the Tritangtu. The journey afterwards is an internalization of the noble virtues of life which are compassion (*welas asih*), equality (*sapajajaran*), intersubjective dignification (*silihwangi*), justice (*kaadilan*), gratitude (*nuhunkeun*) and the ability to reveal the personal destiny (*takdir*). These are the main characteristics of the Sage in Sundanese belief. Moreover, the Sage is always associated with the name Prabu

⁴⁷ See Chittick 2002: 24-26.

⁴⁸ See Maya 2008: 38-39.

⁴⁹ See Sunda lexicon entry of this word, *eling* or its derivation *pepel-ing*, see Danadibrata 2006.

Silihwangi, the *moksa*-King of Pajajaran (12th c. CE). The wise man in this context should be able to perform some sort of outstanding physical and mental challenge. Some of them are able to stand on the top of the rock of the glorious earth which is steep and slippery. Once at the top the wise man then has to move to the neighboring rock, that is, the rock of the ivory stone. He / she has to be able to sit on the top of the rock of the ivory stone and the way down from the ivory throne is very risky. In the final stages of the pilgrimage, the pilgrim learns how to actively reveal his / her own destiny, how to affirm the equality of mankind, the ability to prophesy like a prophet, and the experience of the union mysticism with the Light. The spiritual journey ends in the summit of the light. This is the realization of the enlightened human being or the sagacious individuality.

The referent: The Mosque of Majesty is located higher on the mountain Gunung Padang from which everyone can see the panorama of the South of Bandung. It signifies the glorification of the Almighty. This is the acknowledgement that the Almighty is the only authority and the proprietor of this universe. Human authority is merely a mandate from the Almighty.

Human beings do not occupy and conquer the universe. Moreover, human beings cannot claim that the arrangement and management of life are solely up to human competence and skills. Everybody is merely a mediator who leads the universe and the other creatures to the Majesty. In other words, it is through human beings the Almighty perfects the universe. This is the task of the affirmative life so that individuals are in charge of maintaining and developing all manifestations of life. If one knows his position as the keeper of the earth, one shall realize that human beings are an integrated part of the heavens and the earth.

The rock of glorious earth symbolizes a dignification of the motherland and an attitude of holding the nationhood in high esteem. Every grown-up individual is in charge of protecting the land and the nation. One can express one's duty by nurturing, caring and maintaining any manifestation of life inhabiting the area. Neither are aggressive violence, nor armed defense the primary strategies for protecting the motherland and the nationhood. The nurturing of and the care for the motherland are the ultimate strategies for protecting and maintaining Life. To manage the earth is compatible with the care of human body and soul .

The rock of the ivory throne signifies the dedication of the human authority to fulfill its duty of protecting the motherland and the nation as explained in the rock of glorious earth. Along with to the rock of glorious earth, this rock represents the contemplation of the divine authority as an expression of compassion or '*welas asih*', '*rohman-rohim*'. This expression is the essential Sundanese virtue. The affirmative life is mainly characterized by those who are compassionate and practice this noble virtue.

The commemoration rock slab of Eyang Prabu Silihwangi symbolizes the virtue of gratitude, '*nuhunkeun*'. Human beings should be able to express gratefulness toward any kind of experience and any given bread. By referring to the previous rocks, this stage also uncovers the other essential Sunda virtues of the affirmative life:

the intersubjective dignification, *silihwangi*. Every grown-up individual should be able to express this through a mutual and respectful interaction with the others, the earth and the heavens.

The rock of the seven doors connotes a personal destiny revealed by one's birthday. A birthday connotes a specific destiny for everyone. The grown-up individual should be able to follow his / her own path. This conception of destiny does not entail a passive response. Instead of passivity, individuals should be proactive in realizing their respective destiny (*takdir*).⁵⁰

The curved array of 25 rocks symbolizes not only the 25 acknowledged prophets in the Koran, but also a significant Sundanese virtue, that is, equality or egalitarianism (*sapajajaran*). Then the natural formation can be regarded as the 25 full rice barns, the symbol of prosperity. The idea of prosperity has to do with the value of egalitarianism. Every human and non-human being deserves to have equal access to prosperity in front of The Almighty.

Thus, the duty of human beings is clearer in this context. By following the teaching narratives from the first stage until the curved array of 25 rocks, every individual is called to bring prosperity to all. It is every human being's responsibility to distribute the natural resources so that the other creatures can enjoy life in a proper way. In this context, personal wealth is dedicated to the prosperity of the earth, and the nationhood. By fulfilling this life task, human beings, based on the mandate from the Almighty, expresses the dignification of their selves, the perfection of creation, and the glorification of the Almighty.

The Summit of Light is the final stage in the pilgrimage of life. The purpose of life is depicted in this final place, *the becoming-one* with the universe and the Almighty, the *moksa* in Buddhism; or its sufic equivalent, the *makrifat*, the union mysticism.⁵¹ The experience of 'becoming one' is the final realization of the idea of the affirmative life. The *moksa* or the *makrifat*, is the ultimate achievement of the Sage.

After the grown-up individual ends his or her contemplation in the final stage, he or she is encouraged to actualize his or her own vision and mission as a Sage. The realization of sagacious individuality is done in accordance with one's occupation, competence, skills, and his / her social, cultural and religious context, as well as social roles. After passing the various stages, it is now time to go and perform one's destiny (*takdir*) as the manifestation of sagacious individuality. The Guardian affirms, '*Tereh make salawasna*' or 'Go and apply the values and virtues of the Sage as long as you live'. It is time to dedicate oneself to the service of the affirmative Life.

⁵⁰ See Djunatan 2008: 40, the guardian confirms the active attitude toward the destiny as follows: *Aye-una ngudag lawang tujuh, mun teu mah didinya ngudak hak warisna masing-masing, hak tujuana masing-masing dina poe anu tujuh eta*. In English translation: 'Now, following the seven doors, everyone has their respective pathways in life, respective destiny in accordance with their own birthday.'

⁵¹ This unifying process, becoming-one with the Universe and The Almighty is also rephrased in Sufism as '*ma'rifat*'. Thus this mysticism corresponds with the Sunda primordial ontological paradigm. See Nurbakhsh 2002: 2-3.

4.5. A philosophical interpretation

The teaching narratives above reveal the indigenous ontological conception, that is, the *Tritangtu* or the triadic structure of life. This conception consists of three inter-connecting features: the human being (the self), the earth and the heavens. Each feature exists in a parallel position. These triadic features can not be adequately illustrated as either a two-dimensional triangle, in which the heavens is the higher rank and the other two features are lower, or a hierarchical structure, which places the heavens to be the ultimate, human beings in the middle, and the earth in the lowest place.⁵² (See Fig. 18.3 and Fig. 18.4 below).

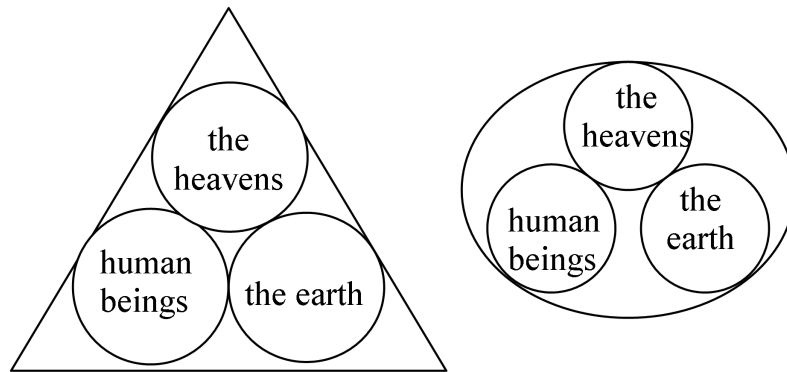


Fig. 18.3. The two dimensional triangle of the *Tritangtu*

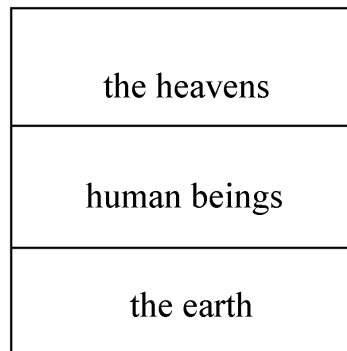


Fig. 18.4. The hierarchical structure of the *Tritangtu*

The problem with the triangle diagram (Fig. 18.3) and the hierarchical structure of the *Tritangtu* (Fig. 18.4) is that they reduce the triadic structure to merely a difference in higher and lower status. Both diagrams only convey the static position of each feature without explaining the dynamic interconnections among the features. The

⁵² For the two dimensional triangle, cf. Sumardjo 2002, 2003:307; cf. Wessing 1979: 102. For the hierarchical structure of *Tritangtu* cf. Sumardjo 2006: 356-360.

diagrams also cannot properly convey the idea that each feature becomes the middle for the other two. Here, the middle should be preferred as a connecting agent more than a static middle position. In this sense, the middle is not associated with an established position or status of the three features in the Tritangtu. The middle connotes a dynamic function of interconnectivity rather than an established status. It is the middle that correlates the other features in the triadic structure.

To consider the middle as the interconnecting agent in the Tritangtu is to illustrate the triadic structure in a three-dimensional dynamic cyclic spiral.⁵³ The three dimensional illustration contains a parallelism of the three features. On the one hand the parallelism describes an equal status of the three features; on the other hand, it conveys the dynamic interconnection among them. The equality of the features emphasizes the function of the middle as the interconnecting agent. Fig. 18.5 illustrates the three-dimensional dynamic cyclic spiral.

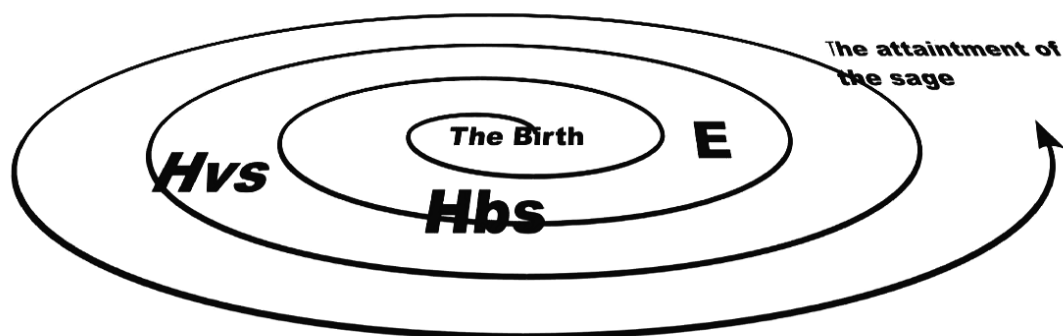


Fig. 18.5. The three-dimensional dynamic cyclic spiral

This three dimensional illustration of the dynamic cyclic spiral shows how the heavens (Hvs), human beings (HBs) and the earth (E) exist in an equal position. It also describes the interconnectivity among these three features. The cyclic life spiral begins at the birth of every individual moving toward the manifestation of the life of a sage. The circular arrows represent a process of life which presumes the interconnectivity among the three equal features for the purpose of the development of the sagacious selfhood. The sage does not reach a final attainment, but the sages' attainment depends on the ongoing actualizations of (Sundanese) principal virtues of life in daily matters. Thus, becoming a sage, which requires the continuous mutual interconnection between the heavens and the earth, is an inevitable process in the development of human character. The development of the sagacious character is impossible unless the awareness and the practice of interconnectivity are realized in daily attitudes.

⁵³ This is an *etic* interpretation inferred from several intensive interviews with the guardians. The *emic* interpretation or the guardians' conception provides the idea that the three features in the triadic structure of life reciprocally sustain each other so that one feature clarifies the existence of the two others.

The illustration of the dynamic cyclic life spiral corresponds to the Sundanese phrase ‘*opat kalima pancer*.’⁵⁴ Word by word, this phrase denotes ‘the four compass points’ (*opat*), ‘the fifth point or the nucleus’ (*kalima*) and ‘the high noon’ (*pancer*). ‘*Opat*’, the four compass points symbolize the universe or the Mandala.⁵⁵ ‘*Kalima*’, ‘the nucleus’ connotes ‘*tengah*’ or the middle. I propose the use of the term ‘the middle’ rather than ‘the centre’ or ‘pusat’ in Bahasa.⁵⁶ The connotation that is derived from the use of the term middle, emphasizes the meaning of ‘the connecting agent’ that conjoins the compass points, *Papat*, or the *mandala*. The meaning of ‘the middle’ is supported by the last word in the phrase, *pancer* or the high noon.

Independently, ‘Pancer’ or the high noon⁵⁷ reveals the moment when light shines without any shadow on all compass points. One can clearly see everything under the sun. One can also perceive a harmonious composition of a landscape. If one combines the middle, ‘*tengah*’ with the high noon, ‘*pancer*’, one will uncover once again the interpretation of the Almighty, human beings and the Universe as the inter-connecting agents. This interpretation is necessary if one wants to reveal the Sundanese way of thinking, that is, the comprehensive worldview. In other words, the Sundanese comprehensive worldview is a presumption which explains why Sundanese people conceive of a relationship between the opposites. In this sense, the mandala or the compass points are comprehensive because they are woven by the connecting agent, the middle.

A Sundanese metaphor of the light also refers to the middle as the interconnecting agent. Pak Undang explained such a metaphor in the following way:

*‘Pancerna, anu tara bohong tea di urang, atawa batin urang, hate urang.’*⁵⁸

*‘Ari tengah pancerna, ari pancer lamun disimbulkeun kana jiwa urang, anu tadi tea nu tara bohong tea, tengahna mah kitu.’*⁵⁹

(My translation: ‘The high noon is the part inside us which never lies, or our conscience, our heart.’ ‘If the high noon is symbolized inside our soul, it is our heart which never lies; the middle is always like that.’)

The citation mentions the idea that metaphorically speaking the high noon inside the human soul is ‘*hate*’, the heart or conscience. The function of the heart or the conscience is to convey the truth. The sunlight offers consideration of and directions

⁵⁴ This phrase becomes one of the meditative keywords on the contemplative site Nagara Padang for a pilgrim. Meditating on this phrase will lead pilgrim’s awareness to honour and to dignify the universe and the Almighty. Dignification of both features in triadic structure of life is equivalent to dignifying human beings. See Pak Undang in Djunatan 2008: 130.

⁵⁵ The Hindu-Tantric and Buddhist *mandala* as the complete structure of the universe is a significant idea of the cosmic existence in the Archipelago. See Sumardjo 2003: 77; Lombard 1995 jilid III.

⁵⁶ In Javanese, the term ‘*tengah*’ could be translated into ‘pusat’ in Bahasa or the centre. Such a translation will reduce the deepest connotation of the word. For the translation of ‘*tengah*’ into ‘pusat’ see Sumardjo 2003, 2006. Geertz 1969; cf. with my research report Djunatan 2008.

⁵⁷ See Danadibrata’s *Sunda Lexicon* for this entry.

⁵⁸ Pak Undang 2008: 130.

⁵⁹ Pak Undang 2008: 136.

concerning what ought or ought not be done. The metaphor of the high noon in this sense is also the presentation of the Almighty inside the human soul. In other words, just as the sun illuminates a landscape, the human heart can also illuminate the right path to walk on and guide the right conduct to be performed. In other words, the light, the sun and the heart is the essence of the Almighty and it is the middle in this interpretation. Therefore, in the Sundanese belief the Almighty is lighting the *mandala*, the four compass points so that it becomes the unification of life. The unification of life represents the comprehensive worldview and human existence as the interconnecting agent in Sundanese people's conception.

The guardian of the site employs the meaning of the human existence as the interconnecting agent, as explained by the phrase '*papat kalmia pancer*', to solve the riddle of *Nagara Padang*. The name *Nagara Padang* consists of the word '*Nagara*' and '*Padang*.'⁶⁰ The word *Nagara* should be read starting from the last syllable to the first one. It becomes '*ra ga na*'. '*Ra*' and '*Ga*' are combined so that one can read them as '*Raga*' or 'the (human) body'. These three syllables are accompanied with the preposition '*dina*' or '*in / into*'. Together the word should be read as '*Dina Raga Na*', or '*in the body*'. The word '*Padang*' means light, brightness, or illumination. Thus the riddle of '*Nagara Padang*' means either 'there is the light in the human body' or that 'the human body itself is the representation of the Light or the Almighty.' Both solutions of the riddle emphasize the following ontological formulations about the presentation of human beings.

- a) The presentation of human beings is the realization of a dynamic inter-connectivity within its inner self.
- b) The presentation of human beings is as a mediating agent who interweaves the different elements in the universe; and by becoming such an agent, human beings are interconnected with the heavens and with the earth.

Both conceptions characterize human existence as an experience of self-enlightenment. In every individual's inner life, there is a tendency to experience self-illumination in order to answer the quests for life (formulation a). In answering such quests for life, an individual should have a sensibility to listen to his / her conscience. Under the influence of the conscience an individual should be able to deliberate and to discern all sorts of impulses and reactions. In doing this, the individual will work it through in their own mind which path in life they decide to take. In order to determine their individual pathway in life, the individual should be able to practice self-perseverance and self-discipline so that he or she is consistent in realizing his or her own destiny in life. By being aware of the purpose of life, each individual is aiming for the realization of the Sage through their daily attitudes. This is the experience of the illumination of the inner self. In short, the experience of self-enlightenment im-

⁶⁰ Cf. the transcription of my interview with Pak Undang in Djunatan 2008: 104.

plies the interconnectivity of the physical and the mental aspects, the body and the soul.

Outwardly, human beings will be interconnected with others in accordance with the second meaning (formulation b). This interconnectivity defines precisely the role of every human being. Such role can be described with the questions ‘*how do I as an individual realize my presentation for others?*’ or ‘*what can I do for others?*’ Such questions are indispensable for individuals rather than asking ‘*what is it?*’ or ‘*who are you?*’ In other words, life is defined by an individual’s role not only to themselves but also their function in a communal life. From this standpoint, the role interconnects the individual with others. The status of an individual is not an established position to define identity.

Thus the *Nagara Padang* site proposes the idea that human beings exist in a mutual interconnectivity. Human beings exist *for* the earth and the heavens and likewise the heavens and the earth exist for human beings. The ontological role is the reason for existence; it is more than a definitive establishment of the self-identity. In other words, the indigenous ontological conception of human beings is that every human being is always interconnected with others. Human existence is an expression of this correlation especially within the triadic structure of life, the ‘*Tritangtu*’. From an *etic* interpretative perspective, I would formulate this ontological standpoint as the *affirmative life*. The word ‘affirmative’ is essential because it will uncover the Sundanese virtues of life that have already been discussed above. An affirmative individual expresses intersubjective dignification (*silihwangi*), reciprocal nurturing, loving and teaching (*silih asuh, silih asah, silih asih*), equality or egalitarianism (*sapajajaran*), gratitude (*nuhunkuén*), compassion (*welas asih*), and justice (*adil*). These virtues explain how Life embodies affirmative qualities in its essence and design.⁶¹ Thus, after discussing the characteristics of affirmative individuals, I will now shift to a wider context of abstraction. The presentation of affirmative subjects draws particular attention to the idea of affirmation as key to conceiving of life in general.

5. Open ending: A comparative study

The indigenous ontological conception of life and human beings underlies an epistemological framework of knowledge production.⁶² Before the discussion of the framework continues further, one should think of the *etic* philosophical interpretation instead of the *emic* one. The external formulation of the *emic* ontological conception

⁶¹ One should refer to indigenous classification implied in the conception of Life. Such classification differentiates ‘*wadah*’ or ‘*cangkang*’ or the designation and ‘*eusi*’ or the essence. A poetic phrase describes this differentiation, ‘*cangkang reujeung eusina kudu sarua lobana*’ (the designation and the essence should be compatible [equal]). See Sumardjo 2006: 331.

⁶² See van Binsbergen 2003 and 2008, for an intensive as well as extensive philosophical discourse of local knowledge production from the standpoint of intercultural encounters.

can be compared with a typical philosophical conception. This typical philosophical conception emerges in the Chinese classical philosophy, the *Dao De Ching*. Thus, the following comparative study between the Sundanese ontological conception and the Chinese one will depend on the *etic* interpretation of both theories. This comparative study will proceed first with the interpretation of the Sundanese ontological conception, the affirmative life.

5.1. The Sundanese affirmative life

Before I explain the triadic structure of life *Tritangtu*, I would like to start with the following Sundanese poetic phrase.

*'Dunya sakitu legana, heurinna ngan ku dua jalma, lalaki jeung awewe'*⁶³

(‘Our vast earth only comprises man and woman’, my translation).

This phrase describes a metaphorical polarized pair, man and woman.⁶⁴ The pair explains the two opposite sides. Other opposites can be mentioned such as darkness and light, success and failure, persistence and distraction, selflessness and selfishness, among others. In metaphors, these opposites indicate the binary presentation of existence, as shown in the previous pairs.

Nevertheless, the existence of these paradox subjects cannot be conceived unless the third conjoining one is implied. If one only recognizes two distinct subjects, one will ignore the foundational one which underlies the whole existence itself. In the quotation above ‘the earth’ or ‘*dunya*’ is the third conjoining subject, which unifies ‘*man*’ and ‘*woman*’. Thus, ‘*Tritangtu*’ is really the triadic structure of life. Symbolically the triadic structure is shown in terms of *the earth, man and woman*. From this standpoint, the opposite subjects are the necessary condition for existence while the underlying third feature is the sufficient reason for existence so that life becomes a comprehensive presentation.⁶⁵

The triadic structure of life implies using logical operations to theorize about the indigenous ontological conception. The indigenous logical operation consists of three mechanisms as follows:

1. The acknowledgement of the unique presentation of a subject. The acknowledgement is meant for the recognition that different features exist in life, either symbolically projected on to the *Tritangtu*, human beings, earth and heavens or experienced inwardly or reciprocally correlated among the mind, the affection and the volition.
2. The assertion of the unique existence of the two distinct representations. This

⁶³ My interview with Abah Karmo.

⁶⁴ It is clear that polarization of subjects discovers Sufism’s influence in the people’s mind and belief. See Chittick 2002: 30.

⁶⁵ Wessing 2006: 211-212.

assertion explains the opposition of one against the other. The assertion is inevitable if one thinks of the diversity of the presentations of individuals, or of the plural expression of the One. Moreover, a clear distinction will define a particularity of self-identity. A man is distinct from a woman. A classification is made for the plural presentations. The man occupies one side, the woman the other. The clear distinction of these sides implies the negative logical operation so that the contradiction will obtain. Only one side is true. Consequently, the prevailing one will synthesize the opposite. This way of thinking, I argue, has been employed in the logic of identity formation and the principle of the excluded third.⁶⁶

3. The apposition⁶⁷ of the dualistic presentations is a comprehensive review. The review is made based on the idea that one side clarifies the existence of the others and vice versa. The negative logical operation of the pair does not demonstrate a complete thinking process. The teaching narratives of sagacity on the site prove this comprehensive worldview. The guardian mentions:

‘...didinya memang éta jalan hadé jeung goréng. Ngan hadé nu mana goréng nu mana. Ulah gorengna goréng teuing. Hadé ge ulah hadé teuing. Sabab goréng teuing kacida, hadé teuing pare ogé loba teuing bera mah euweuh eusian, hapa. Euweuh araheun, hadé teuing. Siger tengah. (Handap) teuing bisi jongklok, tukang teuing bisi jongklok. Geura panggihan, geura tepungan anu aya dina wujud. Geura tepangan anu aya dina raga, geura wincik anu aya dina diri, geura papay anu aya dina rasa.’⁶⁸

(‘... there is good and bad. Yet one has to carefully understand both. It is better if it is not too bad or not too good, because that means excess. If there are too many grains of rice, they are empty. Too good is aimless. Be comprehensive. Too low one can fall; too high one can also fall. Find this out within. Discover this inside the body, perform self-management. Be aware of your conscience.’)

The guardian employs the logical operation of the apposition when he perceives the existence of the opposites such as good / bad (*hadé / goreng*), male / female (*lalaki / awewe*), day / night. The logical operation leads to the understanding that the good is in apposition to the bad. This comprehension is not only about a theory of a balanced perception of these opposites. One should be able to conceive of both sides simultaneously and recognize that the opposites are interconnected. The self-awareness of this appositive correlation is symbolized in the Sundanese compound word ‘*Siger tengah*’ or according to my translation ‘be comprehensive’. This compound word is associated with the idea of the interconnecting middle. The middle functions as the inclusive connectivity of the paradox. This is not a third way which exclusively exists along side the opposites. The opposites are correlated in so far as one side implies the other sides existence.

According to another interpretation, ‘*Siger*’ means ‘crown’ or ‘corona’. Semi-

⁶⁶ Cf. van Binsbergen 2008: 13, 30.

⁶⁷ See Fung Yu-Lan, 1969: 31.

⁶⁸ Transcription of my interview with Pak Undang in Djunatan 2008: 120.

otically, the crown or the corona symbolizes the circle of light for someone who is honored and perfect.⁶⁹ The circle posits the comprehensive worldview so that every presentation is irreplaceable. The circle clarifies the idea that the ‘man’ explains the presentation of the ‘woman’, and vice versa. In short the circle embodies the connecting middle position, which is the apposition of distinct subjects.

Together the ternary logical operations above enhance the idea of the affirmative life in the indigenous ontological conception. The idea clarifies that Life in itself embodies a comprehensive quality. This quality enriches the human recognition of the multiple as well as the unique presentations of individuals. The comprehensive worldview is an explanation of the human interconnecting presentation. It is an inclusive recognition of the others.

5.2. The wisdom of the affirmative life

Wisdom can be considered part of indigenous intelligence⁷⁰ or as a part of indigenous knowledge production. Indigenous sagacious knowledge serves a pragmatic function in dealing with daily conduct and behavior. The pragmatic function acknowledges the nature of human virtues and vices. It also asserts the human virtues against the human fragilities. The identification of virtues and vices in daily conduct explain the prevailing virtues over the vices. Nevertheless, the identification of the prevailing virtues should be completed by a third logical operation. The Apposition of the opposites, that the virtues are seen in apposition to the vices, is needed so that one can understand that the virtues interconnect with the vices.

This apposition is the comprehensive worldview of sagacious individuality. Human beings inevitably identify the bad characters along with the good ones. Thus the binary quality of human characters is the necessary explanation of human existence. A close comparison of the ternary logical operations of sagacious knowledge can be made with Chinese classical philosophy. In the 2nd verse of Chapter 2 of the Chinese *Dao De Ching* it is written:

Therefore having and not having arise together
Difficult and easy complement each other
Long and short contrast each other
High and low rest upon each other

故有無相生，
故有無相生，
長短相形，
高下相傾，

Voice and sound harmonize each other

音聲相和，

⁶⁹ See Wiratakusumah 2008.

⁷⁰ van Binsbergen 2008: 18-19.

⁷¹ Lao Tsu in Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English's translation (1972/1997): chapter 2 'yǎng shēn' 養身 (self-cultured, self-development), in roman pinyin at <http://www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit/daodejing02.php> or <http://www.edepot.com/taocp.html>:

(qu) you wu xiāng sheng, nan yi xiāng cheng,

*Front and back follow one another*⁷¹
Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing,
*teaching no-talking*⁷²

前後相隨。
 是以聖人處
 「無為

Each line of the 2nd verse identifies the opposite, such as *having - not having*. Following the opposites are reciprocal complements, such as *arise together, each other* (*xiāng*, 相)⁷³ and the '(literary) equivalence' ('*zhī*', 之), for the explanation of the correlation between the binary such as 'going' (manage affairs) and 'doing nothing' (*wu wei*), 'teaching' and 'no-talking'. The polarized sides are not intelligible unless this reciprocal correlation is present.

The *Dao De Ching* is also a teaching narrative about a reciprocal explanation or apposition of the paradox. In other words, the reciprocal complements in the second verses of *Dao De Ching* above explain the basic Chinese mindset, the correlative thinking.⁷⁴ The correlative thinking also explains that every subject presumes the existence of the others. A subject is a part of the others, or 'it belongs to others'. In short, each subject needs a reciprocating acknowledgment.⁷⁵ This reciprocity and the correlative thinking explain the wisdom of the affirmative life.

When one thinks of the ideas of the correlative mind and reciprocal thinking found in Chinese classics, one can identify that this mindset is also familiar to the teaching narratives at the contemplative site Nagara Padang. The third logical operation in Sundanese thought demonstrates a similar way of thinking. The apposition or the comprehensive mind reflects the correlative thinking and the reciprocity between two distinct and polarized features of life. One can identify the comprehensive mind in realization of Sunda principal virtues of life. The virtues are an expression of the wisdom of the affirmative life.

If one expresses the wisdom of the affirmative life, one is able to see the fullness of human presentation. To be able to conceive of such a presentation is to improve sagacious individuality. The sagacious individual does not emphasize one side in preference to the other. The wisdom of the affirmative life is a way of thinking that is consistently critical of the desire to prevail over others. One needs to be aware of

chang duan xiāng xing, gao xia xiāng qing,

yin sheng xiāng he, qian hou xiāng sui.

shi yi sheng ren, chu wu wei zhī shì, xing bu yan (er) zhī jiao .

⁷² Cf. Legge's translation of this line: 'Therefore the sage manages affairs without doing anything (*wu wei*), and conveys his instructions without the use of speech'. The character '*zhī*' (之) connects 'go' (manages affairs) with 'doing nothing' (without doing anything, *wu wei*), and 'teaching' with 'no-talking'. See <http://www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit/daodejing02.php> .

⁷³ Suzuki's translation is 'mutually'. Other scholars like Legge translates it, 'one another'; Goddard has 'all are opposite and each reveals the other'. Suzuki's translation of *Daodejing* see. <http://www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit/daodejing02.php>.

⁷⁴ Lai 2002: 22.

⁷⁵ Whit *et al.*, 2001: 10.

our inner negative intention to eliminate others. Instead of expressing this negative force, one needs to promote a more comprehensive worldview. Realizing this comprehensive worldview in daily conduct, one will maintain affirmative individuality. In turn, once sagacious individuality is achieved, one immediately expresses his / her respect for life and dignifies existence in multiple forms.

To conclude this account of work in progress, the contemplative site of Nagara Padang reveals the wisdom of people who inhabit West Java (now comprised of three provinces). However, the Sunda refers to more than the vast land between Asia and Australia and the people who live there. My informant, Ki Laras Maya often said that the Sunda should also be known as an ideology of the wisdom of the affirmative life.⁷⁶ Such wisdom can contribute to human interaction and enhance civilization even though adversity will always occur in the process of mediation or negotiation for a common understanding and for the establishment of peace. Of course, the wisdom of the affirmative life is not always the best medicine for all human problems nowadays. It is a persuasive invitation to a pragmatic interconnectivity and it promotes the primacy of life over our negative interests which try to exploit benefits from other manifestations of life.

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⁷⁶ See interview with Maya in Djunatan 2008.

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