

# Borobudur Temple and Nation Character Building

*by* Agus Murdiyastomo

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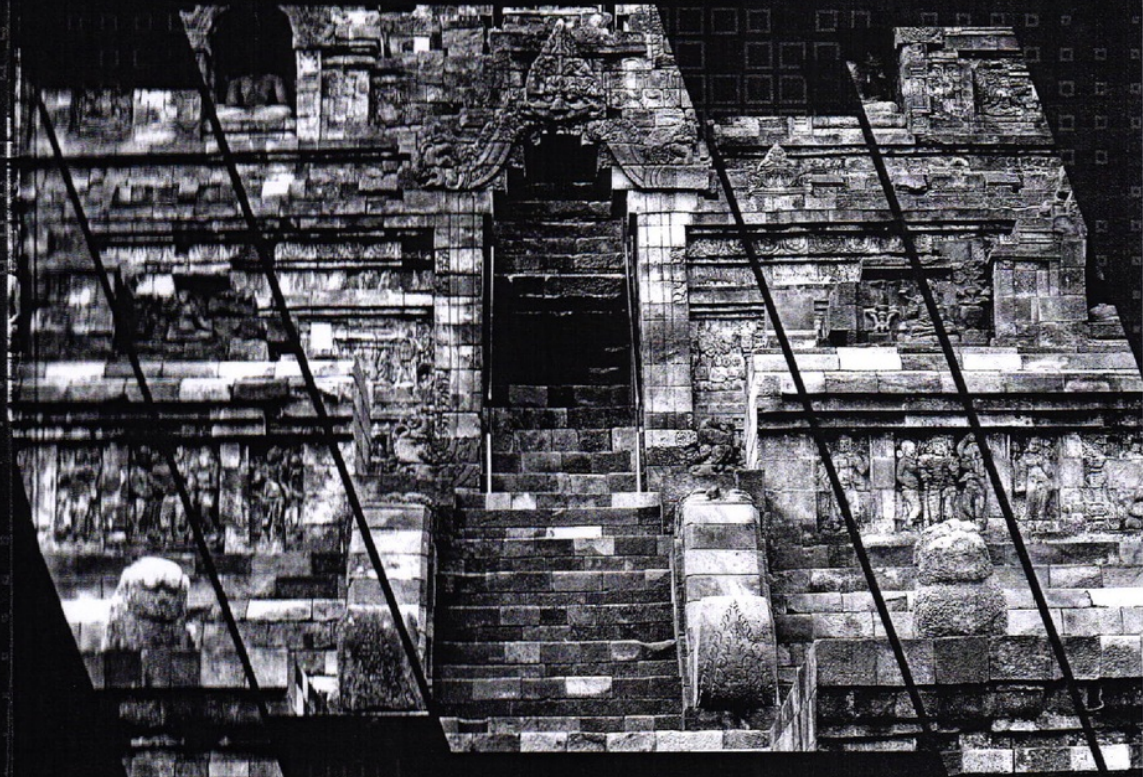
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# Proceeding 6<sup>th</sup> International Experts Meeting on Borobudur 2013



KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN DAN KEBUDAYAAN  
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## Borobudur Temple and Nation Character Building

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### A. Borobudur, a cultural heritage

8 According to Casparis (1950), Borobudur is a place for worshipping. This view is stated based on the inscription of *Karangtengah* and *Tri Tepusan*. Casparis predict that the founder of the temple is the Mataram King from dynasty of Syailendra named Samaratungga who built the temple in 824 AD. The building could be completed at the time of her daughter, Queen Pramodawardhani. It was estimated that the building process took a half century. Karangtengah inscriptions also mentioned about the bestowal of *sima* land (tax-free land) by Çrī Kahulunan (Pramudawardhani) to preserve *Kamulan* called Bhūmisambhāra. The term Kamulan itself derives from the word *mula* which means place of origins, sacred building to honor the ancestors, probably the ancestors of the dynasty Sailendra. Casparis predicts that *Bhūmi Sambhāra Bhudhāra* in Sanskrit language means "a set of often levels of goodness of bodhisattva". This is the original name of Borobudur.

In this area, there are other Buddhist temples besides Borobudur which were found at the beginning of the 20th century. Also, it's found a Pawon temple which stretches in a straight line. Formerly, it was thought to be coincidence but the local fairy tale reveals that there was a paved road lined on both sides balustrade that connects the third temple. It was not found any physical evidence of roads with stones and fence. This is probably just a myth but experts predict that there was a symbol of the unity of those three temples. The three temples (Borobudur-Pawon-Mendut) have similar architectural style and design. Also, they derive from the same period that reinforces the notion of a connection between the third temple rituals. There must be holy linkages but how the rituals are performed is not certain.

Borobudur has been restored several times such as in 1907-1911 and 1973-1983. In addition, Indonesian government has also paid attention to this building. Small-scale restoration was done since that moment, but it's not enough to provide complete protection. In the late 1960s, the government has made a request to the international community for a massive renovation to protect the monument. Indonesian government and UNESCO renovated the monument thoroughly in a large project between 1975 and 1982. Foundations of the building were reinforced and the entire 1,460 relief panels were cleaned. The restoration was done by dismantling the entire five square terraces and renovating drainage systems by embedding water channels into the monument. Filter and water-resistant layer was added. This colossal project involving 600 people to restore the monument cost a total of 6,901,243 U.S. dollars. After renovation, UNESCO put Borobudur into the World Heritage Site list in 1991 (<http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borobudur>, accessed 7th November 2013)



## B. Borobudur : A Tourism Object

After a massive renovation in 1973 which was supported by UNESCO, Borobudur became religious and pilgrimage center of Buddhism again. Once a year, Buddhists in Indonesia celebrate Vesak holy day, the day that commemorates the birth, death and enlightenment especially events that Siddhartha Gautama attained the highest wisdom of the Buddha Shakyamuni. Vesak ceremony was centered at three Buddhist temples by walking from Mendut towards Pawon and ending at Borobudur temple.

Instead of being the center of religious activity, Borobudur temple is the most visited tourist attraction, either by domestic or foreign tourists. In 1974, 260,000 travelers have visited the monument. 36,000 of them are foreign tourists. This number increased to 2.5 million visitors annually until the mid-1990s before the 1997 financial crisis. The development of an attraction is a positive impact on the economy of the surrounding communities. Local people earn a living from Borobudur by opening small businesses around Borobudur. However, a growing number of entrepreneurs often reduces the comfort of tourists. For example, souvenir hawkers who stalk travelers wherever they stepped in to offer his wares. Besides tourists who have been tired are still forced to walk down the aisle surrounding souvenir market. This condition annoys the visitors.

The increasing number of tourists is a positive thing but at the same time it creates a worry since more and more visitors means more burdens that must be held by Borobudur temple. Moreover, most of the domestic tourists have less awareness of the preservation of heritage buildings. They cannot bear not to touch the statue or relief available, although there are many warning signs not to touch anything, even vandalism action of scraping walls, reliefs, and statues are common. Destruction occurs when the peak of the Borobudur Temple was bombed in 1985 by an extreme Muslim group in which the doer had been caught and punished. To reduce the risk of damage, each visitor is assisted by a guide so that visitors are always in control.

## C. Borobudur : Character values

The temple has philosophies embodied in the building level. While, the value of life can be learned from the story depicted through reliefs carved on the walls and balustrades. It was originated from the life of Siddhartha Gautama, but the value delivered is universal. Anyone can pick up and apply the appropriate life without disturbing religious faith they believe in.

### 1. Level of life

#### a. Kamadhatu

The foot of Borobudur temple represents Kamadhatu. The world is still dominated by "kama" or "low desire". This stage is covered by the arrangement of stone that allegedly made to strengthen the construction of the temple. The foot which is closed by additional structure consists of 160 panels of

*Karmawibhangga* story. Travelers can see a small part of *Karmawibhangga* panel in the southeast part of Borobudur Temple. The complete photo of *Karmawibhangga* can be seen in the Museum of *Karmawibhangga* at Borobudur temple complex.

#### b. Rupadhatu

The body of the temple is divided into four terraces which forms around aisle and is decorated 1,300 relief image, called Rupadhatu. Rupadhatu is the world that has been able to break the lust but it is still bound with manner and form. This level represents the nature between the subconscious and the universe. In this stage, there are some Buddha statues at the niches in the wall above the balustrade or breezeway. Originally, there were 432 Buddha statues in the niches along the outer side on the balustrade. On the balustrade, there is little difference in design that symbolizes the transition from the realm Kamadhatu towards the realm Rupadhatu; the lowest balustrade is crowned with jewel while four levels above the balustrade are crowned with small stupas. Part of the square terraces is rich with decoration and carved reliefs.

#### c. Arupadhatu

Unlike the hallways of Rupadhatu which is full of relief, the fifth to the seventh floor walls do not have relief. This level is called Arupadhatu (which means no tangible form). The floor map is circular. This level represents that people are free from all desires and bound forms and shapes but they have not reached nirvana. In the courtyard, there are 72 small stupas which are arranged in three rows that surround a large stupa as the main stupa. Buddha statues are placed inside perforated stupa as in captivity. The statues were still vaguely visible from outside. This clever design explain the concept of transition to a state of disembodied in which the Buddha statue exists but not visible.

The highest level that describes the lack of perfect form is symbolized in the form of largest and highest stupa. Stupa is described plain without the holes. The main stupa is blank which means highest wisdom. This consist of reality, perfect silence and the absence of which the human soul is not bound desires, wishes, and shape and free from the cycle of *samsara* (Sumartono, 2009: 42).

## 2. Relief

#### a. Karmawibhangga

*Karmawibhangga* is carved on the walls of Borobudur temple but this relief is covered by the base of the temple structure. According to the symbolic meaning of the foot of the temple, the reliefs which decorate the walls of a hidden shelf illustrate the law of *karma*. *Karmawibhangga* is a script which describes the doctrine of *karma*, the cause and effect of good and evil. The relief is not only to



provide an overview of the human moral turpitude accompanied by penalties that will be obtained, but also human and reward of good deeds. Generally, the reliefs are the depiction of human life in the circle of birth - life - death (samsara) that never ends. According to Buddhism, this must be removed to perfection.

#### b. Lalitawistara

Lalitawistara is the story of the Buddha which is depicted through a relief along the corridor starting from the Buddha's descent from Tushita heaven and ends with the first sermon in the Deer Park near the city of Banaras. These reliefs line along the stairs on the south side, after a row exceeded the relief of 27 frames starting from the east side of the ladder. All of the 27 frames depict a busy situation both in heaven and in the world, as a preparation to welcome the presence of the Bodhisattvas as the latest incarnation of the Buddha. The reliefs depict the birth of the Buddha in the *arcapada* as a Prince of Siddhartha, the son of King Suddhodana and queen Maya of Kapilavastu affairs. The relief has 120 frames which ends with the first sermon and is symbolically expressed as a Screening Wheel of Dharma. The teachings of the Buddha is called dharma which also means "law", whereas dharma is represented as a wheel.

#### c. Jataka and Awadana

Jataka are stories about the Buddha before he was born as a Prince Siddhartha. The content is about good behaviors, such as self-sacrifice and helpful that distinguishes the Bodhisattvas with any other creature. Some Jataka stories present the story of a fable, the story involving animal characters that behave and think like humans. Indeed, the collection of service or good deeds is a preparation for the effort to reach perfect level.

Awadana is basically similar to Jataka. The actor is not the Bodhisattvas but other people and stories collected in the holy book of Diwyawadana which means noble action and the holy book of Awadana Awadanasataka or a hundred stories. At Borobudur temple, Awadana and Jataka are treated equally. This means that they are in the same row without being distinguished. The most well-known life of the Bodhisattvas is Jatakamala or a series of Jataka stories and Aryasura poet who lived in the 4th century AD

#### d. Gandawyuha

Gandawyuha is the story about Sudhana who wanders tirelessly in his effort to gain the highest knowledge of truth. This depiction is shown by a row of reliefs that decorate the walls of the hall 2. The 460 frames are based on Mahayana Buddhist scripture entitled Gandawyuha, and for the closing part is based on the story of another holy book, that is, Bhadracarī. (<http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borobudur>, accessed 7th November 2013)



#### **D. Values Inheritance as Nation Character Building**

Negative behavior performed by Indonesian people, either by students or public, as well as government officials exhibited on television has shown the occurrence of the moral depravity. For community groups who still adhere to moral values, it certainly raises deep concern. Moreover, the older generation thinks that the situation today is full of bad behavior. They miss situation in the past which is full of honesty and decency. The number of behaviors that show the moral depravity may possibly due to fault of the education system especially with the missing of character subjects in the curriculum. Formal educational institutions are only a high graduation rate oriented. It is possible that the high graduation rate on National Exam will be able to increase the prestige of the school. Thus, subjects which are not tested on National Exam are neglected including the lesson that contains a moral or character formation like a history lesson. With regard to this, education tends to be directed to achieve intellectual knowledge and ignore the spiritual, and social aspects.

Educational curriculum should include some lessons of good characters so that learners are equipped with understanding of how to act and behave. However, the competency-based curriculum does not include a lesson of good character. To overcome this, the School-Based Curriculum (nationally abbreviated as KTSP) is implemented. With this curriculum, schools gain the freedom to develop the material. However, does the material development include the elements of character building? In fact, learners' behavior still far from what is expected. They still do not perform good manner or in Javanese phrase often called "durung jawa". More over, the character values in this nation are declining nowadays. This can be seen from corruption that happens everywhere, fighting, intolerance action, anarchic, and even a murder case which is often showed in the media.

To face this reality, the education experts tries to find solutions by assuming that the character building should begin at an early age through formal and non-formal educational institutions, families and communities. In formal education, it is expected that the character educationis integrated in the lesson. The teaching and learning materials for Character education can be formulated into 18 characters such as religious, honesty, tolerance, discipline, care for the environment, social care, the curiosity, the spirit of nationalism, love of country, creative, hard working, independent, democratic, peace-loving, friendly, respect achievement, fond of reading, and responsibility (Center for Curriculum, National Education Department : 2010). If character education successfully integrate these items to the existing subjects, the students are expected to not only learn the theory of character (how to know )but also learn to behave with good character ( how to do ).

To produce learners who have good characters, the teacher's role becomes very important; therefore the teachers must be able to become a role model. A teacher

should be "digugu lan ditiru" (must be followed and imitated). They must be able to provide role models for students. Their behavior should reflect a figure that has good character both inside and outside of school. It certainly goes back to each individual. If the teachers want to follow the example given by Ki Hajar Dewantara that educates the cultural approach, the values will be embedded. (HY. Agus M, 2010).

Building the nation's character is certainly not an easy task that can be accomplished in a short time. The result of what we do today can be seen many years later. The success of building a nation's character is certainly not solely the responsibility of the school but also the families and communities. At school, learners acquire only a little theory and practice. The example that the students get is from outside of the school environment through the media, observation and direct experience which may give much bigger influence on the students. With regard to this, the development of the nation's character cannot leave the role of public. Their participation is absolutely needed.

Borobudur as a monument contains the ancestral values such wisdom which is found in Karmawibhanga relief, Lalitawistara, Jataka and Awadana, and Gandawyuha. The Reliefs depicting about work ethic, good and bad deeds followed by punishment and reward is in line with the character that should be instilled on the Indonesian citizen. Unfortunately, the reliefs which contain the story with a good message is often illegible. Visitors usually only see and admire the beauty of the reliefs as a work of art and only a few people who are trying to understand what behind the beauty of the relief is. Therefore, the values depicted on Borobudur temple need to be socialized because that may become one of the nation's means of building a character. With regard to this, the preservation of this monument is obligatory.

To develop Indonesian citizen who have character, the community is expected to have an insight about the broader culture. Borobudur should not only be seen as a religious building (Buddhism) but also as a cultural heritage which has universal positive values. Positive values of the relief that is depicted can be learned based on the teachings of religion that the students follow. Thus, a visit to Borobudur will not weaken the faith but rather to strengthen the faith to God Almighty.

Character education through formal education may utilize Borobudur Temple. By visiting the temple and giving an assignment to the students based on their level of education, the students will be able to examine and understand the messages conveyed through the existing relief. The Stories carved on the wall would be difficult to understand therefore the students need a guide who can explain the story and its meaning. In this case, the guide is supposed to master the material, like storyteller who tell a story or a puppeteer when performing. The tour guide that was accompanied by a teacher may also put emphasis on the moral messages so that learners can pick those messages, understand the values of life, and able to differentiate between the good and the bad



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