

# Knowledge and Image across the Boundary:

## -Javanese-Malay in Niche-

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### 1. Introduction

This paper aims to discuss how knowledge of magic is possessed by a minority, while it is dispossessed by the majority in a society. <sup>1</sup> The discussion here will mainly be concerned with Javanese-Malay in Malaysia.

“Javanese-Malay” is not an official term in the statistics or based on a solid standard, but was created by myself for the purpose of translating *orang jawa* in the context of daily Malay conversation. Javanese-Malay, or *orang jawa*, means Malaysian citizens who are categorized as “Malay”, though with strong consciousness of Javanese origin. They are not always visible, because they are Malay which is one of the officially, politically recognized “races” in Malaysia, together with Chinese and Indian. <sup>2</sup> They are sometimes confused with undocumented migrant workers from Indonesia, whose number is estimated up to almost one

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1 This paper is based on the field research conducted in Johor in 1998 and in Kedah 1999. Thanks are due to Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister’s Office, Malaysia, and Prof. Zainal Kling of Universiti Malaya, Prof. Shamsul A.B. of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

2 The term “race” is officially used in Malaysian documents related to registration of the citizens. The basis of this categorization was, however, laid under the colonial regime. Long before the official sanction of the Malaysian Government, the natives of the Peninsula and the Archipelago have been collectively dealt as “Malay”, whereas the aboriginal groups were named under the “pagan tribes”. See for this, for example, Raffles, Crawfurd etc.



million.<sup>3</sup> These illegal migrants are often called *Indons* by Malaysian press but sometimes also called *orang jawa*, because most of them are considered to be originated from Java. Although the term *orang jawa* is sometimes confusing, Javanese-Malay mentioned in this paper, by their possession of their legal status as “Malay” and “Malaysian”, are distinguished from these recent migrant workers who are “uninvited guests” are supposed to threaten the integrity and security of the host society.<sup>4</sup>

Despite clear legal difference between Javanese-Malay and undocumented migrant workers, the former started their life in Malay Peninsula just as the latter. They accepted hard and low-waged jobs avoided by local establishment such as Malay and Chinese, because they migrated without any capital as new-comers or as indentured labourers. Both Javanese-Malay and migrant workers from Indonesia are known as hard-workers, the reputation common generally vested to migrant workers. They often share the image, imposed by other Malay and non-Malay people in Malaysia, of sorcerers with strong power. In the below I should like to discuss how this image emerged and how it is related with their position in Malay society.

## **2. Migrants to Malay Peninsula**

Malaysia is known as “multi-ethnic” nation and the government itself stresses multiplicity of languages and cultures. However, multiplicity is clearly defined as least on political level and on that level Malaysia consists of three groups, or “race” if we adopt a term mentioned by the federal government in official documents, i.e. Malay, Chinese, and Indian.

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3 New Strait Times, January 1, 1997. Among others Indonesians are most, then the Bangladeshis. The Malaysian authority repeatedly strengthened their legal measures and tried to sweep up these illegal workers. Although the economic situation affects the influx of illegal workers, the shortage of labour inherent to the Malaysian economy made tough measures against illegal workers ineffective. Kassim 1998 gives an detailed and concrete view of illegal migrant workers from Indonesia.

4 See Karim 1996, Kassim 1997 for instance. The latter, in particular, gives a detailed account on the physical settlement of the illegal migrants and related sociological matters.



Wang Gungwu defines Chinese and Indians in Malaysia as “migrants of difference”, migrants who have cultural backgrounds totally different from the local Malay people.<sup>5</sup> In contrast with Chinese and Indians, the Javanese-Malay whom we will discuss in this paper, and the recent migrant workers from Indonesia, could be defined as “migrants of similarity”, again according to Wang. The migrants from the Archipelago are mostly Moslems just as Malay, speaking Malay/Indonesian or other languages of Malay-Polynesian phylum. Their customs are not very different from Malay, compared with Chinese and Indians. It is not very difficult for them to gain Malay status at least theoretically.

Migrants of difference were brought to Malaysia in colonial period from distant place of origin such China or India while migrants of similarity such as Javanese in Malay Peninsula are not bound to any specific era. The number of the Javanese immigrants increased drastically in colonial time. Yet the flow of migrants from the Archipelago existed long before and is still undisrupted.

The three ethnic categories mentioned have its basis in colonial era. The categories such as “Chinese” and “Indian” were created by the colonial administration; various groups from China were lumped together as “Chinese” and the groups from India as “Indian” respectively. The creation of such “ethnicity” was strengthened by communalism. There have been various discussions concerning the origin of the term “Malay”. It is certain, at least, however, the British colonial government tried to distinguish Chinese and Indian from local people.

So far little has been mentioned on the migrants of similarity, the human flow from the Archipelago, except the recent influx of migrant workers from Indonesia and the “peril” caused by them. It is natural to postulate that throughout the long run migrants of similarity

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<sup>5</sup> Wang Gungwu “Migration in Southeast Asia – Past and Present” , oral presentation at a workshop “Contemporary Migration in Southeast Asia” in Singapore in 1998.



merged to Malay or became its constituent. In the census conducted by the colonial government, people from Sumatra, for example, were counted as “Malay” until 1921,<sup>6</sup> whereas ethnic sub-groups originate from Indonesia and Southern Thailand, for instance, are invisible in the census after independence.<sup>7</sup>

Human flow from the Archipelago left clear footprint in the history of several kingdoms such as Johor or Selangor. Javanese already settled in Melaka as early as in the fifteenth century, having their own quarter and head [Winstedt 1986:72-73]. They are known as traders of rice and other foods and sailors in Melaka. “Javanese” necessarily means Javanese-speaking people from Java but might include those from other areas dominated by Majapahit kingdom, the powerful kingdom which flourished in the fourteenth century.

The Javanese reappeared as migrant workers in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In the census in Singapore in 1825, 38 Javanese were counted among 1,746 Indonesians when the total population was 11,851. In the second half of the nineteenth century the number of Javanese and Boyanese increased considerably.<sup>8</sup> In Johor there is no statistics of immigrants from Netherlands East Indies before 1911. In 1911 out of 117,800 immigrants from Netherlands East Indies in British Malaya, 37,000 were found in Johor.<sup>9</sup> Johor had one third of the immigrants from Netherlands East Indies to the Peninsula through 1911-1957.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Tunku Shamsul Bahrin 1967

7 There are groups such as Orang Asli, Thai, and Sam Sam. See, for the latter two groups, Kuroda 1992, Nakazawa 1992 etc.

8 The survey started one year earlier in 1824. However, no Javanese was counted in 1824, while there were 1,851 Bugis and Balinese. In the census in 1871, however, the number of Bugis remained almost the same and Balinese disappeared, in contrast with the increase of Javanese [Tunku Shamsul Bahrin 1966:269].

9 Tunku Shamsul Bahrin estimates that only a small number of Javanese stayed in Johor until 1901, because there were few economic opportunities. Tunku Shamsul Bahrin 1967:275.

10 Johor Kingdom, too, opened the gate for foreign migrants for the purpose of accelerating land development [Aziz Muda 1981:157]. According to an estimation, the number of Javanese and Buginese in Johor reached 30,000 in 1894 [Aziz Muda 1981:157]. The number of migrant workers from Indonesia was far less than those from China and India. The former usually formed the second or third choice when Chinese or Indian workers were not available because of the epidemic etc [Saw 1988: 40].



### 3. Javanese-Malay Population in Johor

The present paper is at least partly based on the research on a Javanese-Malay in a certain part of Johor in 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Either the present Javanese-Malay or their parents there arrived in the Peninsula in the first half of the twentieth century as indentured labourers from Java.

Although detailed statistic data on the place of birth of the present population are not available, the state of Johor is known for its heavy concentration of Malay of Indonesian origin. The rural areas around the city of Batu Pahat are particularly known with Javanese and Buginese descendants.

A survey in 1947 shows that more than fifty percent of the population of Indonesian origin in the Peninsula arrived in the period between 1911-1930.<sup>12</sup> This period saw expansion of small holders and the cultivation programs by the government,<sup>13</sup> and a number of Javanese came as indentured workers for rubber plantations. Some of them remained in the Peninsula and exploited the virgin forest, converting it into agricultural land,<sup>14</sup> although they were supposed

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<sup>11</sup> The data on which this study is mainly based was acquired in the research in the district of Batu Pahat, Johor in 1991 and is supplemented by literary sources. The research was conducted as a part of a study on the folk medicine and its conceptualization in Malaysia. Another research on the aforementioned theme was carried out in Kedah in 1992. For this, see Miyazaki 1994. Thanks are due to Socio-Economic Research Unit (now Economic Planning Unit), Prime Minister's Department for its official support. The researches were financed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Program of Scientific Researches, Ref. No. 03041033 and 05041015.

<sup>12</sup> Although it is difficult to gather information on the migrants from Indonesia, especially on the free and independent migrants, some evidences are available for the indentured migrants. The indentured migrants were regulated by the Netherlands-Indies government with some exceptions. Prohibition was issued in 1887, while in 1909 the measures for protecting and regulating Indonesian labourers to the Malay Peninsula were enacted by the Dutch colonial government [Saw 1988: 38].

<sup>13</sup> Tunku Shamsul Bahrin 1967:273.

<sup>14</sup> At least after 1913 when Malay Reserve Law was enacted, there was no restriction for the Javanese migrants to access the Malay Reserve which were, and are, not open to non-Malays. In this law Javanese were included in the concept of "Malay". "Malay means a person belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks the Malay Language or any Malayan language and professes the Moslem religion" [Malay Reserve Law No.15 quoted by Khazin 1987:63]. It is likely, as Aziz Muda writes, that some of the Javanese migrants first occupied lands leased by the Malay dignitaries (*orang kaya*), Chinese, or Europeans [Aziz Muda 1981:159]. However, there were strict rules formulated by the government of Netherlands-India for the migrant workers. The official statistics



to return to Java after the contract terminated. They started to exploit coastal areas and then proceeded into the inland areas. According to Javanese-Malay in this area, the Bugis found their bases in the coastal areas, planting coconut trees, while Javanese tended to occupy the inland area, planting rubber trees.

The author conducted his research in 1991 in *Mukim* (village) S which was officially established in 1937, though some hamlets (*kampung*) had already existed even earlier. Unlike areas totally developed for plantation, this village, located about 20 miles from the sea, was opened because of iron mine, which started its operation in 1930s under a Japanese mine company. Until the mine was closed down in 1940 when the cost of exploitation there did not match the mine on the East Coast, a number of Javanese were brought in as miners.

However, some miners remained in the area after the mine was closed down. They gradually opened up the virgin forest in the vicinity. According to some villagers, they, or their parents already cultivated the land around the area for planting vegetables when the mine was still in operation.

Javanese-Malay in S village are generally aware of their own or their parents' place of origin in Java. It should be remarked that most of them were from East Java, in particular the area around the city of Ponorogo. Although this suggests that earlier migrants invited their relatives or friends or agent(s) might have focused their recruiting activity in a certain part of Java, it does not always seem to be the case that migrants followed their kin or relatives. It is rather difficult in the S village to trace kinship ties among the present residents except the tie established after they settled in the village. Villagers often told that their parents or

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shows that the most indentured workers returned to Java [Saw 1988:41]. It is not certain whether the Javanese-Malay in Johor settled as a result of official conversion of their status or of illegal migration.



grandparents were first brought as indentured workers to Johor by the agents.<sup>15</sup> Poverty seems to have been the main “push” factor. They referred to poverty caused by dense population, heavy tax, or fragmentation of cultivated land etc.<sup>16</sup>

While there are still some rubber-tree plantations, which were once very popular throughout the Peninsula, most villagers in S are engaged in agriculture, either holding their small oil-palm plantations or working at others’. In the statistics, Javanese-Malay are counted as Malay which is not further sub-divided. The villagers insist that “90%” of the village population consist of *orang jawa*. Beside Javanese-Malay, there are small number of “Banjarese” and a few Chinese who run shops and firms in the village.

Table 1: Population and Houses in Mukim S.

	Total	Malay	Chinese	Indian
Population	14,750	13,536	1,161	53
Houses	2,287	2,138	138	11

(Source: Rengkesan Maklumat Asas Kampung Kawasan Mukim S, 1987.)

It is clear from Table 1 that figures that at least 90% of the village population is “Malay”. The village is administered by a *penghulu*, an officer appointed and stationed by the District Office in Batu Pahat. S consists of sixty-five hamlets (*kampung*), among them ten are ranked as major hamlets (*kampung induk*) and have their own heads (*ketua kampung*). Unlike appointed and stationed *penghulu*, hamlet heads are the local residents. Houses in kampong

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15 There were British agencies based in Singapore, and also the ones owned by Javanese Sheikh Hajis [Khazin 1987:73]. They should hold the license issued by the Netherlands Indies Government [Saw 1988:39].

16 Although I could not encounter in S village, some migrants in Selangor were motivated by strong wish to make pilgrimage to Mecca. This is reported by Khazin who interviewed Javanese-Malay in Selangor [Khazin 1987].



are generally arranged along a water-way and the names of kampong are *Parit* so-and-so, named after the founder of the water-way and kampong.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Javanese-Malay Identity

Usually the term *orang jawa* means sub-category of *orang melayu* (=Malay) in Malaysia. It is sometimes used in contrast to *orang indonesia* (=Indonesians) or *Indons*. The latter exclusively refers to recent migrants from Indonesia. Javanese-Malay, *orang jawa*, who hold Malaysian citizenship, tends separate themselves from *orang indonesia* who are often illegal entrants. It should be noted that migrants from Archipelago before 1940s left “Java”, as Republic of Indonesia was not established at that time. What evokes their nostalgia is not “Indonesia” but “Java”, therefore. Covered with *orang melayu* category, being *orang jawa* is an unofficial and covert category. Javanese-Malay in S village speak Javanese with each other in their daily life<sup>18</sup>, although they speak Malay, too. Young generation Javanese-Malay can hardly understand Javanese and are Malay mono-lingual, however.<sup>19</sup> Particular wording and pronunciation sometimes suggest influence of Javanese. When a Javanese-Malay has a casual talk with unknown Malay, he sometimes examines whether the stranger is *orang jawa* or not by checking the accent and vocabulary which are particular to Javanese Malay.

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17 The present writer stayed in one of the kampungs in Mukim S, and interviewed the local people while observing their daily practices. The main channel of his communication with them was Malay, occasionally complemented by Javanese, as they often speak Javanese mixed with Malay.

18 Although Javanese language is known with its elaboration on honorific forms, the villagers only use the “low Javanese” called “ngoko”. This does not mean that they already forgot the “high” version (krama) which requires a certain alternative set of vocabulary. It exactly reflects the general situation in Javanese rural areas. Use of honorific forms in Java is too often emphasized and stressed so far, based on the royal practices. Daily conversation in Javanese villages is usually styled without heavy use of honorific. While Javanese in Java characterize their language by mentioning the honorific forms, Javanese-Malay in Johor, seldom refer to honorific forms as the distinctive feature of Javanese.

19 Malay has been used as a lingua franca in the Archipelago, although it consists of many dialects and possibly there have been differences between the lingua franca version of Malay from place to place. The degree of penetration of the lingua franca Malay has been also different from place to place. Generally speaking, the Malay has been used in the north coast of Java, while in the interior the Javanese language dominated. For those who had not received any school education in Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese is still the sole means of communication in the rural areas of the interior Java.



Javanese origin is often revealed by a personal name, too. Although the second and third generation of Javanese-Malay usually have Malayo-Arabic names as many other Malays, their fathers often retain Javanese names which often end with *-man* or *-min*, for example. When father's Javanese name is attached to a person's name with *bin* or *binti*, then, the Javanese origin is obvious.

Even in the big cities it is not rare to encounter Javanese-Malay. Usually after several minutes casual talk, they reveal their ancestry upon enquiry. Slight reluctance they show when they confess their origin is surely related with their minor position among Malay. They still have to cope with an stereotyped image of workers of the lowest stratum.

Many Javanese-Malay still maintain ties with Java and have ever visited their relatives in Java. Even those who do not have any acquaintances in Indonesia visit Indonesia for tourism. They often talk about the culture shock they experienced in Indonesia. Many were shocked with the poverty and the dense population there. They often faced with treachery and shrewdness of Javanese brokers and street vendors, when they went shopping or tried to buy tickets for transportation. As they witnessed, Indonesian taxi drivers tend to charge double when they knew that their passengers are from Malaysia. Those who visited the villages of their ancestors were asked to afford economic assistance for their far poorer relatives there. It is easy to understand that for the Javanese-Malay who have been accustomed to tranquil Malay kampong life, hustle and bustle in Javanese cities were totally different world.

## **5. Self-image and Imposed Image of Javanese-Malay**

Javanese-Malay in Malaysia are often believed to possess strong "magical" power and are skilled in sorcery.<sup>20</sup> There are many *bomoh* (sorcerer) of Javanese origin, it is said, although

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<sup>20</sup> Here I employ this rather obsolete term only for the sake of convenience. By "magic" I mean the whole range of practices concerning the causal-effect relationship which are excluded from so-called "science". Distinction of science from magic is not clear-cut and depends on the folk definitions.



their statement has no solid basis. Something related with Javanese is sometimes regarded as “magical” or “mystical”. For example, in 1994 a *bomoh* and his wife were accused of murder of their client for money. The *bomoh* insisted, according to a report, that he was in possession of the late President Soekarno’s scepter which gives tremendous mystical power to the holder. Although it is not reported in the newspapers, a rumour that they are of Javanese origin prevailed.<sup>21</sup>

A Malay *bomoh* admits that their Javanese rivals are known to be powerful but dangerous, or dangerous but powerful. Another Malay *bomoh* told that Malay *bomohs* do never harm people while Javanese *bomohs* are quite dangerous [Miyazaki 1994: 90]. On the other hand another Malay *bomoh* in the northern states where there are not many Javanese-Malay, was proud of his tutelage to a Javanese guru who happened to visit his area [Miyazaki 1994:99-100]. The general reputation of “*orang jawa*” as hard-workers is also attributed to their “magical power”.

This stereotype is not merely imposed by the other people. The Javanese-Malay often describe themselves as magically powerful. Several medicine men in S village are proud of their skills and knowledge which the first settlers from Java and were inherited among Javanese-Malay.<sup>22</sup> Pioneers’ tremendous vigour, with which felled trees and opened virgin forests into rubber tree plantations, is also explained as their magical power.<sup>23</sup>

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21 In 1994 a state politician was murdered and his property including his car, cash and landholding certificate were stolen. A *bomoh*, his wife, and his assistant were accused as the culprit. The politician was turned out to be a client of the *bomoh* and was murdered during a ritual for regaining vital force conducted by the *bomoh*. The *bomoh*, some people say, was of Javanese origin, though this is not ascertained. It was proven, however, that in many occasions the *bomoh* claimed his training of his professional skill in Java. It was also proven by other politicians that he tried to sell them “a scepter once in possession of the former Indonesian president Soekarno” as an object with full of mystical power.

22 While the magic practitioners are in general called *bomoh* among Malay people, the Javanese-Malay mention such specialists as *dukun* or *wong tua* as is the case in Java.

In contrast to the term *wong tua* (literally “an old man”) which connotes respect for a person of wisdom, the term *dukun* is often used in Java in case of accusation of a “sorcerer” who practice magic for evil purpose. Among the Javanese-Malay and the Malay in



In the below, several examples will be shown from Javanese-Malay's knowledge in magical practices.

a) Divination

Divination method based on Javanese calendar is still known to most of the old men in S village. The Javanese calendar consists of a number of cycles; among others the five-day and the seven-day cycles are most important.<sup>24</sup> These cycles are used in combination so that they form a thirty-five day cycle.

TABLE 2:  
Javanese Five-day and Seven-day Cycles and Their Numerological Values

Five Day Cycle ( <i>pasaran</i> )	Numerological Values ( <i>neptu</i> )	Seven Day Cycle ( <i>dina</i> ) <sup>25</sup>	Numerological Values ( <i>neptu</i> )
Legi	5	Ahad	5
Pahing	9	Senen	4
Pon	7	Selasa	3
Wage	4	Rabu	7
Kliwon	8	Kemis	8
		Jumuah	6
		Setu	9

The specialists divine one's fate or fortune of a certain day based on the numbers allotted a priori to the days of the five-day cycle and the seven-day cycle. These numbers are used exclusively for the purpose of divination and form a part of specialist knowledge. This numerological method is exclusively Javanese and has never been reported in other societies of Southeast Asia.

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general, the term *dukun* is not regarded so much as negative. The terms *bomoh* and *dukun* are often used interchangeably in Malaysia, though the former term is preferred. In any case there is no official or recognized qualification of these specialists, and, therefore, the distinction between specialists and non-specialists is not clear.

<sup>23</sup> Javanese and Javanese-Malay are believed to be hard-workers, sometimes because of their mystical knowledge. In contrast Javanese in Java portray themselves as not hard-working, which is a remnant of the colonial view of "the natives".

<sup>24</sup> The cycles in use in modern Javanese divination are the five days, seven days, six days, twelve months (Javano-Arabic lunar months), thirty weeks, and eight years. In Old Javanese, i.e. the pre-Islamic, and the Balinese calendars there are more cycles.



FIGURE 1  
*Naga Taun* (Serpent of Year)  
 Ominous Directions of the Year

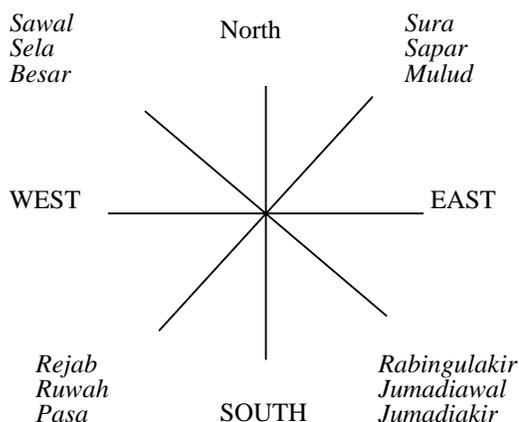
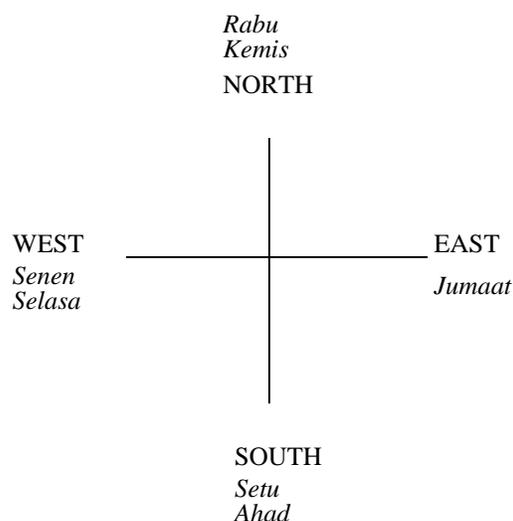


FIGURE 2  
*Naga Dina* (Serpent of Day)  
 Ominous Directions of the Day



There are several methods used for finding a good direction to move in or of avoiding an ominous time to move among the Javanese-Malay in S village, too. Two examples are shown in FIGURE 1 and 2. According to these method, one should not proceed or move towards the direction of the cosmic serpent which changes the position every three Javanese months or every day of a week.

A few old men in the village know a method for matching couples. A diviner adds numerological values of the birthdays of a boy and a girl and then subtracts one by one from the sum, uttering a word each time. The word uttered last shows the fate of the couple.<sup>26</sup>

25 Although *dina* literally means "a day", it more specifically denotes the seven days.

26 See TABLE 2 for the cycles and the numerological values. Javanese birthdays are based on the combination of these two cycles. This means that one may celebrate the birthday (*weton*) every thirty-five days. The sum of the days according to the two cycles are reduced one by one while uttering a word each time; *lahir*, *sandang*, *pangan*, *lara* and *mati*. The first three words, which means "birth", "clothes" and "foods" respectively, are good omens, while the last two are the bad ones; they mean "sickness" and "death".



This numerological method of divination is very popular among Javanese in Java, while it has not been found in any other place in Southeast Asia including Malay Peninsula. This means that they were brought from Java.

It is natural to think that much might have been lost among the second or third generation of Javanese immigrants, as variety of “magical knowledge” possessed by the Javanese-Malay is quite limited compared with the whole body of the magical knowledge in Java. It should be taken into account, however, that even in Java practitioners in folk knowledge often consult handbooks which are specialized in this field. These compendia are not known among the Javanese-Malay.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas some crucial factors in Javanese divination, such as *pasaran* or five-day cycle, are also important in Javanese daily life when fixing the day of a village meeting and practicing asceticism,<sup>28</sup> this is not the case among the Javanese-Malay. They never use the Javanese calendar in their daily life, but solely for divination. For them, five-day cycle is only for divination. Javanese-Malay “tradition” have been uprooted, in this sense, from the ground from which it was born.<sup>29</sup> One often encounters Javanese-Malay who boast of possessing knowledge of magic and divination, looking down Malay people for being not knowledgeable in this field. They are fully aware, however, that what they know is an incomplete version of

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27 In Java this method of divination is very popular and has quite a few variations. The knowledge of divination and magic already began to be documented in the second half of the nineteenth century. Compendia in the form of booklet or book that carry knowledge on divination and magic are known as *primbon* in Java. As a consequence of transition to “literacy”, orally transmitted knowledge of divination and ritual now tend to be underestimated. In S village, on the other hand, such compendia are not known. Although old people in the village are quite proficient in speaking Javanese, they seldom read and write Javanese. Their tie with Java has not let them import written sources from Java, even though some of them visited Java repeatedly.

28 The village meetings are named after the days on which they are held: Selasa Kliwonan or Senen Ponan for example

29 In Java there is still a remnant of the old periodic market system to which the five-day cycle was originally related. As the name of the five-day cycle, *pasaran* (<pasar=market), shows, it is related with the market cycle. We can still find the place names such as Pasar Kliwon or Pasar Legi in Javanese towns. There is no such market in Johor.



the divination in Java which they find their roots. Their lack of confidence occasionally leads them to invite a *bomoh*, or better say *dukun*, a Javanese and Javanese-Malay term for sorcerer and medicine man, in quest for more powerful treatment of disease and so on.

#### b) Folk Medicine

Besides the field of “black magic” which is generally regarded “anti-social”, Javanese-Malay reputation as skillful *bomoh* also relies on their practice in folk medicine, too. Folk medicine is generally admitted to be “pro-social” so far as it remains means of medication alternative of or supplementary to the cares given at hospitals. This is common among Malay, and the Javanese-Malay are not exceptional, even if some of them have extensive knowledge on folk medicine.<sup>30</sup>

There are several medicine men in S village, with diverse degree of specialization, professionalism and orientation. They vary from those who only medicate their families and relatives using plants in their yards mainly for chronic diseases as asthma, diabetes, or hypertension, to those who run laboratories where they produce various medicine with their own brands. In the vicinity of S village, there is even a factory of Javanese medicine (*jamu*) run by a Javanese-Malay.<sup>31</sup>

Except for the factory-made medicine, the medicine prepared by a *bomoh* should be given to patients with proper spells (*jampi*). Medication without spells is believed to be ineffective. In principle Moslems are allowed to use only the Quranic verses for “spells”. Although a few *bomohs* in S village admit the use of Javanese spells and many still retain that knowledge, most *bomohs* insist that they only made use of the Quranic verses. They also tell that although

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<sup>30</sup> Generally speaking, Malay attitude for medication is highly practical in the sense that the shift from hospitals to medicine men or vice versa often takes place. They consult whoever they may be, as far as effective.



they formerly used Javanese spells, they are now aware of the “proper” ways according to Moslem doctrine.

Some medicine men’s reputation extends beyond the village. Patients sometimes come over from the town of Batu Pahat or even from Johor Baru. The medicine men often boast of having clients from Kuala Lumpur or even from Singapore.<sup>32</sup>

A couple of example will serve for presenting a concrete image of Javanese-Malay medicine men. A medicine man in his sixties lives in the periphery of the village. He was born as a son of an immigrant from East Java. Although his father was not a *dukun*, he privately learned herbal medicine from Javanese as well as Chinese specialists in several places in the Peninsula. He stated that the tutelage to a Chinese was of additional nature and stressed his mastery of the Javanese herbal medicine through a Javanese Moslem. He has regular transaction with Chinese traders of medicine. It is probable that his knowledge of the Chinese herbal medicine helps him to merchandise his product through this channel.

He insisted that the quality of plants is very important for producing medicine. He moved from Muar to S, just for the reason for seeking good plants. He ever visited Indonesia several times to purchase materials for medicine and the books on the Javanese medicine. According to his evaluation, the Javanese plants and the know-how are the best and authentic. He explained that Javanese people still have “vital force” (*semangat*), because there are still “saints” (*wali*) and many miraculous beliefs in Java. The vital force is very important when one makes medicine, he stated. He lamented the loss of such vital force that was once held by

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31 Jamu is herbal medicine mixed with many sorts of herbs and plants. They are very popular in Indonesia. They are sold at markets or by street-vendours, while they are made in factories in the forms of pills, powder, or capsules. In Malaysia, only ready-made versions are well-known and much are imported from Indonesia.

32 Two examples concerning the Javanese-Malay activities in herbal medicine will be given in the appendix.



the Javanese-Malay; the vital force was lost when they became Malay and pious Moslem according to him.

Although he stressed the quality of material and the Javanese way of medicine as the best, he never forgot to add that the use of the Quranic verses as a spell is indispensable.

In contrast to this relatively Islam-oriented medicine man, a producer of *jamu* is a secularized business man who runs a “factory” just outside the S village. The factory is owned by a Javanese-Malay family. The founder, father of the present director, is alleged to originate from one of the Javanese royal families. The founder had studied Javanese herbal medicine (*jamu*) in Java under Javanese and Chinese specialists. Just like the medicine man in S village mentioned in the above, this factory, too, imports materials for medicine, because they are of better quality and cheaper compared with the ones available in Malaysia. The medicine they produce, mostly in pills and capsules, are sold in the drug stores and markets. They do not need any spell by medicine men, when they are taken. The brand suggests their Javanese origin and the products seem quite popular, at least, among the Javanese-Malay.

From the examples mentioned in the above, it is clear that the Javanese-Malay make use of the knowledge of traditional medicine which was brought from Java as their resource for operating as sorcerers or medicine men. Their knowledge and skill in sorcery and folk medicine contribute to their reputation as powerful *bomoh*. The view that the something “authentic” and “powerful” exist in Java is not limited to the above-mentioned medicine men but also shared by other Javanese-Malay. A number of Javanese-Malay insist that a *dukun* from Java exerts much more power than a Javanese-Malay *bomoh*. They also say that they sometimes invite a *dukun* from Java when they need more effective treatment of diseases or other troubles of themselves. Despite their fame as powerful *bomohs* in Malaysia, the Javanese-Malay are aware of their “limit”.



## 6. Source of the power and re-Islamization in Malaysia

As was described in the above, the Javanese-Malay do possess the knowledge on divination some of which are apparently of Javanese origin. The fame of the herbal medicine imported from Java to the Malaysian market may help to associate Javanese-Malay and folk medicine. The exotic calendars used by Javanese-Malay when they make divination might help to amplify their image as the holders of mystical knowledge. However, it is unlikely that only these factors play a decisive role in shaping the image of Javanese-Malay as powerful medicine men. The reason should be sought from different angles.

Let us turn our attention from the immigrants to the receiving party for a while. That Malay people are never knowledgeable in divination and magic is an exaggerated statement much distorted by a certain ideology. As is immediately clear from Skeat's *Malay Magic*, Malay had, at least in the past, a variety of knowledge and practiced divination and sorcery. It is true, nevertheless, that we can hardly encounter the great variety of "Malay magic" recorded by Skeat in the end of the nineteenth century. Much seems to have been lost with the lapse of almost one century. Obviously "modernization" on the one hand and "re-Islamization" on the other have contributed to this change. These two processes which are sometimes contradictory yet are more often inter-linked with each other, have unanimously been eliminating *ilmu* and folk beliefs in general by condemning as "heretical" or "backward".

Despite the effort to eliminate magical elements from the modern and Islamic points of view, however, Malay magic is still practiced, though not in the same way as in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> It is not an exaggeration even today to say that there is at least one *bomoh* in each Malay hamlet. Moreover *bomoh* is not a typically rural figure any more. They often operate in

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33 See for instance Miyazaki 1994, Itagaki 1992. Itagaki 1995 offers a detailed account of the folk theory and materials of the Malay folk medicine in Kedah. There are a number of written sources for the Malay folk medicine and belief; see, for example, Warisan Perubatan Tradisional, Gimlette, Skeat etc.



urban areas where their business is much more lucrative. Malay magic is still closely related with the Malay daily life.

Nevertheless, the major change that occurred since Skeat's Malay Magic is advancement of re-Islamization. Present *bomoh*, Moslem *bomoh* in particular, is much more careful with being "Islamic" possibly than ever. Malay spells have been replaced with the Quranic verses. Moreover, they generally tend to deny, at least formally, that they are engaged in spiritual cults. They pretend to be pious Moslem even though the definition of Islam differs from *bomoh* to *bomoh*.<sup>34</sup>

The shaping of the image of Javanese-Malay as powerful *bomohs* can be considered in connection with this change of attitude among Malay towards folk belief. We need to take into consideration the following matters: that folk belief still play an important role among Malay people, that Malay people once had, and still have, though lesser extent, knowledge and skills of sorcery and folk medicine, and that the Malay reliance upon folk belief has become latent as a result of re-Islamization.

Generally speaking, Javanese attitude towards Islam has been rather different from Malay. Javanese tolerance in the practices of folk belief is somewhat maintained among Javanese-Malay in the Malay Peninsula. Beliefs and rituals they tolerate might often been condemned as heresy by Malay. In Malay society, Islamic orthodoxy is stressed more than in Java where the beliefs tend to be more syncretic.<sup>35</sup> Both Malay and Javanese-Malay share the view that Javanese are less orthodox in Islam. Thus, even though the Javanese-Malay stress their piety in Islam, they are still viewed as retaining heretical elements. It should be noted that they, in a

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34 See, for example, Miyazaki 1994.

35 Javanese immigrants in the Peninsula were already believed to be able to manage supernatural power better than Malay in the beginning of this century. See for this Khazin 1987. Yet the Malay preoccupation was surely related with the point which will be discussed presently.



sense, take advantage of this negative labeling for shaping their stereotyped image as medicine men.

The negative label can be considered to be a part of the images attached to the marginal groups in general. Association of marginality and “supernatural power” is also apparent in the Malay views towards Orang Asli and Thai people. In Malay society the groups of Orang Asli are believed to possess very strong supernatural power and are often feared for this.<sup>36</sup> When we only observe Orang Asli groups, we are tempted to interpret the label in terms of “nature/culture” opposition, stating that Orang Asli’s closer position to “nature” causes awesome feeling for those who stand on the side of “culture”. However, a similar stereotyped image is imposed to Thai people in the northern states of the Peninsula. There Thai *bomoh* are believed to be skilled in spiritual cults.

The association of the Javanese-Malay and their supernatural skills should be, thus, viewed in the context of the relation between the dominant vis-à-vis the marginal groups within a society. The marginality is, of course, not only defined in terms of “ethnicity” but also in terms of religion, as was already mentioned in the above. Compared with the situation in the end of the nineteenth century when Skeat gathered materials for his *Malay Magic*, Moslem orthodoxy has become more influential. Present Malay *bomoh* are possibly much more sensitive to the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy than *bomoh* in the nineteenth century and the Javanese-Malay *dukun*. They particularly avoid the views that they are engaged in spirit cult or that they use non-Quranic spells. In the course of this “re-Islamization”, many elements have been questioned, defined as “folk belief” and then eliminated as heresy. They are alleged to belong to “others”, the marginal groups that have been gradually incorporated in one society. Because it is impossible to wipe out folk belief totally, the re-Islamization, paradoxically enough, necessitates complementarity in the non-

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<sup>36</sup> See for example Skeat 1900, Taib Osman 1989, etc.



Islamic sphere. In this sense the Javanese-Malay utilize their knowledge and marginal position as their “cultural resources” that serve for allowing them a certain position in Malay society.<sup>37</sup>

It should be noted that the definition of “others” does not occur in reciprocal way. Theoretically “self-other” relationship is always relativistic and inherent in any level of groups. Yet in reality it reflects asymmetrical relationship between the dominant and the marginal groups. As the dominant group, Malay are never regarded as magically dangerous by the marginal groups, while the latter finds their niche in the Malay dominating society by being regarded as dangerous.

## **7. Becoming Malay**

As we have seen, the Javanese-Malay boast of their knowledge and skills in medicine and sorcery. This means that they established their niche in Malay society. However, they distinguish themselves from their ancestors and the Javanese in Java by stating that they are now pious Moslem. Accordingly, the Javanese spells they once used seem to have been replaced with the Quranic phrases. Re-Islamization is taking place among them, too, which is one of the necessary steps for them to be a full member of Malay society. Apparently transition from Javanese-Malay to Malay is in progress among the Javanese-Malay; a transition in terms of religion and language.

This transition, however, implies the abandonment of their niche and their skill in magic. Some dukun lament their loss of power (*semangat*) which, they believe, is still held by Javanese in Java or Indonesians who remain less Islamic. In search of their lost power, the Javanese-Malay often invite native Javanese specialists from Java. They believe that dukun from Java are still powerful in magic. The quest for Javanese materials for making herbal

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37 The same strategy has been adopted by the Baweanese in Singapore and Malaysia. They make use of their knowledge in Islamic teachings in the process of gaining their position in Malay society. See Mariam 1998.



medicine is based on the same idea. The Javanese materials are “authentic” and “powerful” for the Javanese-Malay.

The transition from Javanese-Malay to Malay, which also means a transfer from the periphery to the centre, is necessarily coupled with creation of the periphery that should be marginalized. For the Javanese-Malay, Indonesian people are to be peripheralized. The perplex and dismay they experience in Indonesia is connected with, or at least contributes to, their effort of peripheralizing Indonesia. In spite of their land of ancestry, Indonesia, for them, looks like a mysterious land full of chaos, poverty, crowd, and uncertainty. Although Indonesia covers their land of origin, it is no longer theirs but other’s.

It is not superfluous to add that becoming Malay is not necessarily a process of adopting one thing and abandoning another. An excellent example for this is a folk dance performed by Javanese-Malay. In Batu Pahat area there are several groups that perform a folk dance called *kuda kepang*. The dance was originally brought from Java and has been played exclusively by Javanese-Malay dancers and musicians. The groups are often invited to perform in the capital as a representative of the state of Johor. Without any mention of its origin, the dance is just introduced as a traditional folk dance in Johor. On the one hand, *kuda kepang* gives them secret delight of cultural superiority which compensates their socio-religious inferiority. Javanese-Malay, who sometimes suffer from abuse by other Malay for their formerly humble status and their proximity to illegal entrants from Indonesia, console themselves with praise of the refinement and variety of the Javanese arts and literature. On the other hand, this example shows an aspect of Malay culture and “Malayness” which has been formed as a result of incorporating components of different origins.



## Conclusion

A brief survey of Javanese-Malay in Johor in the above leads the following conclusions. First, their alleged skill in magical practice is largely structural, i.e. due to their marginal position in Malay society. Second, their tolerance in syncretism and knowledge they brought from Java has been their resource for gaining a niche and livelihood in Malay society albeit marginalized. Third, as the Javanese-Malay adapt themselves to Malay, their niche and specialty inevitably dissolve. Third, their full assimilation the dominant Malay means that they have to leave their niche and this results in replacement of a marginal group which they stigmatize and define as “others”. The marginal group they found is Indonesians.

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