

The Concept of Sacredness of the Prayer Hall at the Vihara Mendut, Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

The postmodernist perspective presents religious architecture with a hybrid concept: modernity that positions locality as a privilege to be present with symbols and traditions of religious faith. Empirical phenomena shows that religious architecture in the scope of the world until locus of Java-Indonesia, is a reflection of Nature and culture combined with symbols and traditions of religion. The combination is capable of adapting with the current era, which is a manifestation of modernity. This phenomenon raises concerns about the blurring of the disclosures of sacredness due to various sources of inspiration.

This study examines sacredness created by the Javanese locality combined with symbols and traditions of religious faith, and modernity. It looks at Vihara Mendut as a manifestation of Theravada Buddhist architecture in the locus of Java-Indonesia. The study scope is limited to be the prayer hall as the main building of worship. This religious architecture has been selected because it is located in a place that has a historical background with a strong charisma of Javanese Buddhism in the classical era (4th-16th century AD). This charisma is still present today.

The study adopts "thick description" and interpretive reflectiveness as a method, in order to explore each layer of architecture. These layers are form, life-world, and values in architecture. The findings are the concept of sacredness presented by the "architectural brilliance" of Javanese locality,. This has an identity and is open to modernity. It is respectful of symbols and traditions of religious faith, eclectic, harmony, present with "other than local" to beautify the world. It is a vernacular that is adaptive to the present time

This study concludes that sacredness presents the essence of the "architectural brilliance" of Javanese locality, namely the "true I" which refers to "non-self". There is nothing permanent and all conditions are always inter-related (constantly changing). This research is useful as a reference for the development of religious architecture in general and especially Theravada Buddhist architecture in conveying the message of the value of life by promoting inter-culturalism that inspires one another.

Keywords: Religious architecture, Theravada Buddhism, Sacredness, Locality, Hybrid.

1. Introduction

Postmodernism is a scientific paradigm that presents a sagacious form of modernism, namely by accepting the pre-modern mindset as a form of modernity revision (Sugiharto, 1996). This is accomplished by taking the diversity of manifestations of the cultural context to obtain the truth (Leach, 1997). This paradigm has a very large influence on the world of architecture, especially religious architecture. The various views of postmodernism in architecture consist of modernism which returns to vernacular formations that present buildings and living spaces as homely (Morawski, 2013), blending the present with the past to create complex and contradictory architecture (Venturi et al., 1977), and a pluralism that respects diversity, being contextual rooted in place (Jencks, 1992). This concept leads to the keyword "hybrid" which puts forward local values in modernity as an inspiration to learn from each other and improve one another. The hybrid phenomenon exists and is present in religious architecture.

Empirical phenomena show that religious architecture is a reflection of Nature and culture (Jordan & Lepine, 2018) combined with symbols and traditions of religious faith to convey spiritual meanings (Geva, 2018). This condition is reflected in the religious architecture of the Java-Indonesian *locus* since the classical era of "Hindu-Buddhism" (4th-16th century AD) until now as a consequence of globalization (Sudikno, 2017). The eclectic character of Javanese people (Mangunwijaya, 1992) presents a logical consequence that the architecture in the Java *locus* has a local and global concept with an adaptive nature (Priyotomo, 2014). Religious architecture in the Java *locus* presents a sense of locality that is open to diversity (Rahadhian, 2008). In different cases, religious architecture is a container of *hierophany* for reasons of religion as a sacred identity (Swan, 1990) which symbolizes axioms and religious faith with a specific historical background (Barrie, 2010). This condition raises concerns about the blurring of the disclosures of sacredness due to the blending of locality with symbols and traditions of religious faith, and modernity. To address this problem, it is necessary to study the sacredness created by the special Javanese locality combined with symbols and traditions of religious faith, and modernity.

Theravada Buddhist architecture constitutes a form of religious architecture for Theravada Buddhists. Theravada is the oldest school of Buddhism which is growing rapidly in Sri Lanka and has spread to Southeast Asia (including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia) (Zaun, 2003). According to Zhang, the Theravada Buddhist architecture shows local cultural features (Zhang, 2018). This is a logical consequence of the contemporary Theravada Buddhist tradition (Crosby, 2013; Holt, 2017).

Vihara Mendut is one of the Theravada Buddhist complex currently located in the *locus* of Java-Indonesia. It is adjacent to the Candi Mendut in the Candi Borobudur area. This place has a historical background with the strong charisma of Javanese Buddhism in the classical era of "Hindu-Buddhist" (4th-16th century AD). The Candi Borobudur as an icon of Buddhism in Indonesia that displays the aesthetics of Javanese Buddhist art (Yatno, 2020) is a clear proof of the existence of this specific charisma to this day. Vihara Mendut is a place surrounded by mountains and is situated close to the city. This condition presents a local Javanese life-world that is vernacular mixed with modernity in everyday life. The nation-wide celebration of Asalha Puja and Vesakha Puja presents Vihara Mendut as part of a series of processions centered in the courtyard of Candi Borobudur (Waluyo, 2016). This celebration activity showcases a life-world with the characteristics of the Theravada Buddhist tradition combined with the Javanese traditions and modernity. Overall, Vihara Mendut is a significant religious architectural object worthy of research study.

The scope of the study is limited to the prayer halls as a special main worship building of the Vihara Mendut. Prayer halls (called *cetiya* in Buddhism) are one of the basic types of Buddhist architecture (Schliesinger, 2016). The prayer hall serves as a place for worship and meditation, a place for worshipping the Gotama Buddha's statue, places for venerating relics, and a place for placing offerings of *puja* objects as acts of devotion. The prayer hall is an indoor worship building that can be accessed by the public (tourists) with the aim of appreciating the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism. The prayer hall presents a comprehensive

function in the encounter with the manifestation of holiness, namely Gotama Buddha. Thus, the prayer hall in Vihara Mendut is an interesting object to be studied.

The purpose of this study is to find the unique concept of sacredness in the prayer hall at Vihara Mendut, at Java-Indonesia *locus*. The sacred concepts are abstract ideas of sacredness which is manifested in architecture. The findings are useful as a reference for knowledge of religious architecture in general, and the prayer hall at the Theravada Buddhist architecture located on Java in particular.

2. Literature Review

Religious architecture presents a discourse on the concept of sacredness as ideas in expressing sacredness. According to James Swan, the existence of an element of holiness for religious reasons is an architectural way of expressing sacredness (Swan, 1990). The element of holiness, namely *hierophany*, is a supernatural condition, eternal, full of substance, divine reality, perfect, and mysterious (Eliade, 1959; Otto, Harvey, & Press, 1958). Furthermore, human beings ritually create an abstract sacred space into a more real "sacred place" (Smith, 1992). According to Thomas Barrie, architecture expresses sacredness through mediating elements, namely symbolism, religion, and the in-between as dynamic relations in binary conditions (Barrie, 2010). Walter adds that ambiguity in architecture presents a religious experience, triggers an encounter with holiness, and conveys religious truth (Walter, 1988). Beauty in sacred space presents an orderly perception, archetypal elements (including: stones, trees, water, sky, and mountains), and atmospheric elements of space (McNally, 2019). Lawlor clarifies the existence of physical elements that have spiritual meanings to frame the sacred environment and facilitate a strong sense of sacredness (Lawlor, 1994). Architecture presents sacred ideas by providing physical and metaphysical meanings (Hoffman, 2010). This series of discourses contributes an argument that the concept of sacredness exists through several aspects, namely *hierophany*, human rituals, physical elements, and the atmosphere of space (namely: ambience and sense of space).

The Theravada Buddhist architecture presents *hierophany*, namely *ti-ratana* as the three protectors (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha). Siddhattha Gotama is regarded as the closest Buddha in this era who represents all Buddhas. The *Dhamma* is the teaching of Gotama Buddha. The Sangha is a sacred brotherhood as protectors of the Dhamma (Cantwell, 2009). The essence of the teaching is to eliminate the cause of *dukkha* (suffering) that comes from *tanha* (craving) with the practice of *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (concentration for mental stability and tranquility) and *vipassana* (knowledge of light) (Buddhadasa, 2000). This essence is applied in *puja-bakti* as worship and in actual practice (Uttamo, 2007). The concept of sacredness is based on the faith of Theravada Buddhism (i.e.: *hierophany*, essence of teachings, ritual practice) and is manifested in the symbols and traditions found in religious architecture.

The prayer hall is a type of religious architecture in Theravada Buddhism under the umbrella of Buddhist architecture (Schliesinger, 2016). The prayer hall is called a *cetiya* as a place of "worship" in memory of Gotama Buddha (Crosby, 2013). The types of *cetiya* are: *dathu-cetiya* which functions to enshrine the remains of the Buddha's body, *paribhoga-cetiya* serves to perpetuate the relics of the Buddha, *dhamma-cetiya* serves to place the *Tipitaka* scriptures, and *uddessika-cetiya* serves to enshrine statues of Buddha and Buddha images (Sulan, 2017). Rathanapala (2015) examines the *cetiya* and *thūpa* as a place to remember Gotama Buddha with special reference to the canon. Spink (1958) describes the development of the *cetiya* as a place of communal worship which is one of the basic types of early Buddhist art in India. Alone (1996) describes the various forms and patronage of Junnar Chaitya Caves as a religious architecture of Buddhism in classical India. Kyaw (2021) examines the *cetiya* campuses in Myanmar which have famous statues with religious views, Buddhist architectural arts, and tourism-related interests. Snodgrass (2003) describes Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya in Thailand which expresses modernity by maintaining cultural integrity. Sulani (2014) examines the architecture of Dewi Samudera Cetiya in Singkawang, Indonesia which presents the general principles of Chinese architecture and *Feng Shui* combined with geometric symbols and natural

phenomena. Based on the discourse on prayer halls (*cetiya*), no specific research has been found on the concept of sacredness in the context of Javanese locality combined with symbols and traditions of religious faith, and modernity.

According to Schulz (1988), the purpose of architecture is to create a meaningful place that allows human beings to be able to determine their orientation to the surrounding environment. Each place has a uniqueness that distinguishes it from other places. Furthermore, Mangunwijaya argues that the taste of local culture will bring religious architecture to a perfect completion (Mangunwijaya, 1992). This presentation focuses on the Javanese locality which enhances the existence of religious architecture. Prijotomo describes the characteristics of Javanese architecture under the umbrella of Nusantara (an architectural term in Indonesia since the classical Javanese period) including:

- (1) The architectural form of the shelter, namely the floor and roof, has a higher level of importance than the walls;
- (2) The roof presents embellishments with variations based on the form of a pyramid;
- (3) The use of organic materials of wood and local natural stone;
- (4) The *façade* presents adornments compared to the interior;
- (5) *Emperan* (terrace) as the most comfortable place for socializing and a transitional space from profane to sacred;
- (6) The hierarchical principle of *pelataran* (courtyard) as a profane area to *ndalem* (a metaphorical term from home) as a sacred area (Prijotomo, 2018).

Ruslan (2019) describes the architecture of a Javanese house in the classical era of Majapahit (13-16 AD) which is characterized by not having pits and being situated directly on the ground. Hidayatun examines the characteristics of religious buildings in Javanese architecture, namely *omah tajug* which has a square base area and a roof resembling a *meru* (mountain). This is a symbol of the abode of the saints (Hidayatun, 2004). Religious architecture in the form of Hindu-Buddhist *candi* (an old stone building used for worshipping) in classical Java displays ornaments that have spiritual values. Ornaments in the form of transcendental creatures in Hindu-Buddhist mythology include *kinnara-kinnari*, “guardian lions”, *kala-makara*, and *gana*. The crown ornament on the roof of the temple, namely *kemuncak*, refers to the most sacred hierarchy. Typical ornaments of Buddhist *candi* include Buddha statues, lotuses, and *chakras* (wheels). The whole ornament has a Javanese identity that shows Indian influence (Halim, 2017). The study of spiritual architecture in the Javanese context presents its peculiarities, namely: light creates a hierarchy of profane to sacred spaces, gates and terraces separate the outside and the inner world, the radial path shows the *axis mundi*, and traditional Javanese architecture respects Nature and the environment (Trisno et al., 2020). This discourse discusses the concept of sacredness based on the local Javanese architectural forms.

The life-world discourse in the Java *locus* covers social behavior and ritual traditions that present an atmosphere of space. The characteristics of space in the Java *locus*, which are tranquil, close to Nature, and modest are the hallmarks of a life-world that emphasizes *roso* (feelings). The principle of order is manifested in the manners of Javanese society. Sitting on the floor is a vernacular characteristic as a form of humility and modesty. The attitude of *ngajeni* (respect) is manifested in the attitude of walking while squatting near the object of worship, sitting cross-legged as well as kneeling on the floor. This social behavior has a logical consequence that the room displays an orderly arrangement, the difference in floor height as a form of hierarchy, and the room is in the form of a hall without chairs (Nuryanto, 2019; Sari, 2007). Javanese religious people have rituals with sacred signs, namely *sesajen* (offerings) including flowers, lamps, and fragrances which form the cosmological system of Javanese society (Endraswara, 2003; Nuryanto, 2019). Trisno emphasizes that ritual and time are part of the concept of space in spiritual architecture in the Javanese context (Trisno et al., 2020). This discourse discusses the concept of sacredness based on the Javanese locality of life-world.

Mangunwijaya (1992) explains that Javanese architecture presents a cosmological symbol with the concept of *pusering jagat* (*axis-mundi*) as a relation between the heavens, the human world we live in, and the underworld. According to Nuryanto, *omah* (house) which is called *ndalem* is a metaphor, namely having the literal meaning of “within me”. *Omah* is symbolized by the human body consisting of head, body, and feet. The roof as a pointed head refers to the sacred heavens. The space for human activities is the body. The foundation as a foot is a symbol of human relations with the underworld (Nuryanto, 2019). The ornament of mythological creatures in Javanese architecture is a symbol of the guardian of holiness that represents human relations with the heavens and underworld. Furthermore, the crown of the roof, namely the *kemuncak* symbolizes the heavenly realm and a form of respect (Halim, 2017). Adiyanto (2014) describes the value of oneness with Nature as the relationship between architecture and Nature. This discourse discusses the concept of sacredness based on Javanese locality values in architecture.

Religious architecture in the Javanese locality discourse displays eclectic characteristics as a logical consequence of the mixed nature of the Javanese-Indonesian people (Mangunwijaya 1992). Kustedja studies the Chinese temple in Java-Indonesia which explains expressions and attitudes of cultural acculturation by adopting the worship of local symbols (i.e. local figures and local Chinese diaspora figures) combined with symbols and traditions of faith (Sugiri Kustedja & Salura, 2014). Limanto studied the pattern of acculturation of Javanese culture with Buddhist traditions in the *Dhammasala* at Maha Vihara Majapahit Trowulan, East Java (Limanto, 2007). Prasetyo explains that the meaning and value of the spiritual symbols of Buddhism and Chinese culture at the Vihara Teratai in Surakarta-Indonesia is a combination (Prasetyo, 2019). Polniwati Salim explains the application of Chinese architecture and acculturation to the Jin De Yuan Temple in the Chinatown area of Jakarta as a blend that puts forward local cultural values (Salim, 2012). According to Katarzyna Kowal, *Candi Borobudur* presents a symbol of Buddhism that is based on local patterns and local Javanese culture of everyday life (Kowal, 2019). The study of Buddhist architecture at the Java-Indonesia *locus* shows the significance of the mixed characters including Javanese locality, symbols and traditions of religious faith, and the character of the country where Buddhism spreads. However, there has been no study that specifically describes the concept of sacredness with the background of a combination of Javanese locality, symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism, and modernity in the case of the prayer hall study at the Vihara Mendut Java-Indonesia.

Scientific studies on the topic of Buddhist architecture have been carried out in several countries. A study on the spatial composition of Buddhist Temples in Central Asia with the aim of describing the process of transforming the shape of a stupa as an architectural way of discussing sacredness (Nakamura, 2016) may serve as an example. Another example is a study of Buddhist architecture in Thailand which has a relationship with royal symbols as a strong image in expressing sacredness (Rod-Ari, 2009), and a study of sacred characteristics through a sense of place at a Thai Sacred Place (Sowanee, 2009). Sudikno (2002) describes the relationship between religious syncretism and the arrangement plan at the Zen Buddhist monastery. Furthermore, scientific studies with the scope of the Java-Indonesia *locus* in the discussion of religious architecture and sacredness have been found. Maputra (2016) identified the application of Buddhist symbols in Theravada and Mahayana schools with case studies of Vihara Mendut and Vihara Jina Dharma Sradha in Java. A study of spiritual architecture in its Javanese context discusses the sacredness of traditional Javanese architecture (Trisno, Claudia, & Lianto, 2020). Soewarno (2020) examines the adaptation of architectural styles to preserve cultural heritage buildings with a case study of the religious architecture of Mahayana Buddhism at Vihara Dewi Welas Asih, Cirebon. Sugata (2021) examines the typology and morphology of the stupa architecture of Theravada Buddhist architecture at the Padepokan Dhammadipa Arama in Java. From the existing scientific publications, no specific study has been encountered of the sacredness created by the special Javanese locality combined with

symbols and traditions of religious faith, and modernity in the prayer hall at Vihara Mendut in Java-Indonesia.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Prayer Hall at The Vihara Mendut

Vihara Mendut is a Theravada Buddhist architecture located in the Java-Indonesia *locus*. It is situated in Mendut Village, Mungkid District, Magelang Regency, Central Java. It is located 18 km from the city of Magelang, and 28 km from the city of Yogyakarta. It is a form of contemporary religious architecture that is adjacent to Candi Mendut as a classical Javanese Buddhist Temple from 824 AD. Vihara Mendut functions as a worship building and monastery. The location map for Vihara Mendut is shown in figure 1.



Fig. 1: Location Map of the Vihara Mendut and its Surroundings

Sources: <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mendut+Buddhist+Monastery>

The context of the natural environment shows that Vihara Mendut is located near the city and is surrounded by mountains and hills (East side: Mount Merapi and Mount Merbabu; West side: Mount Sindoro and Mount Sumbing; South side: Menoreh hills; North side: Mount Tidar). Within such a condition, Vihara Mendut presents an interlacing of religious fabric for the inner strength of rural communities on the mountainside as well as its urban communities. The rural communities include Batur Village, and the Jlarem Village on the slopes of Mount Merbabu, Kalimanggis Kaloran Village in Temanggung, Jatimulyo Village on the slopes of Menoreh Hills, and Butuh Village on the slopes of Mount Sumbing-Sindoro. Meanwhile, urban communities come from the cities of Magelang and Yogyakarta. Furthermore, the historical context shows that the *locus* at Vihara Mendut in the classical Javanese era (precisely, during the Mataram Kuno kingdom of the Syailendra dynasty in the 8th century AD) was a *madya* (middle) area as a place of residence for monks. This condition presents the Javanese charisma of classical Buddhism today. Vihara Mendut is thus a suitable choice of religious architecture in the search for the concept of sacredness rooted in place, combined with symbols and traditions of religious faith, and modernity.

Vihara Mendut was established in 1976 by His Holiness Bhikkhu Sri Paññāvaro, Mahāthera (as Head of Vihara Mendut and Head of the Sangha Theravada Indonesian). In 1992, it underwent renovation and development. Bhante Paññāvaro worked with a team of building experts (Ir. Dharmali Kusumadi, Ir. Gunawan Marga Widodo, Ir. Wayan), and a local craftsman, I Nyoman Alim Mustapha. The team of experts had diverse religious backgrounds. The concept of harmony in diversity is attached to Vihara Mendut from the process to its realization.

The prayer hall is the main *puja* (worship) building at the Vihara Mendut called Dhammasala. The form of a prayer hall is a single mass building surrounded by a *pelataran* (courtyard). The *emperan* (terrace) surrounds the inner space as a transitional area. The

pelataran features an outdoor *puja* area in the form of a gazebo encrusted with a Mandalay-North Myanmar-style reclining Buddha statue. This statue is a patron of Kassapa Buddha as one of the seven Buddhas of antiquity before Gotama Buddha. The object of this *puja* is part of the Theravada Buddhist tradition. The presence of a gazebo provides a visual appeal before entering the prayer hall (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Image of the Prayer Hall and *Pelataran* at Vihara Mendut
Source: Author

The prayer hall is located in public zones adjacent to the main gate. The adjacent spaces are by the path of Dasa Paramita (path to the private area), the entry courtyard with a lotus pond, and Candi Nyanasamvara Sangharaja as an outdoor *puja* area (see fig.3). Figure 4 shows the floor plan, elevation, and section of the Dhammasala as a prayer hall.

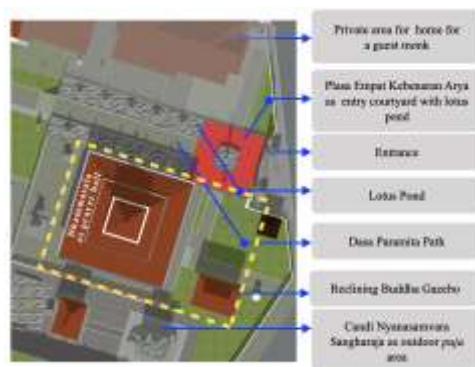


Fig. 3: Site Plan Dhammasala as the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut
Source: Author

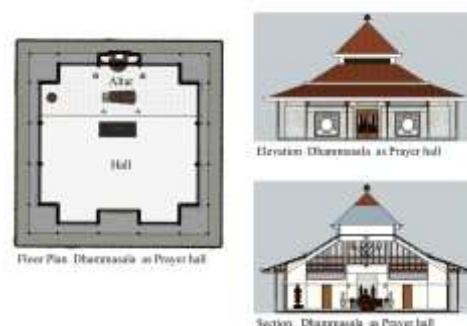


Fig. 4: Floor Plan-Elevation-Section Dhammasala as the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut
Source: Author

Dhammasala as a prayer hall was chosen as the boundary of the case study based on the following considerations: first, the identity of the Javanese locality combined with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism and modernity is described in terms of form and life-world. Second, the appearance of the building is preening with the use of patterned ornaments when compared to other buildings at Vihara Mendut. Third, the interior of the building is preening with the presence of objects of Gotama Buddha *puja* in various forms. Fourth, the function and use of a very comprehensive prayer hall in encounters with manifestations of holiness in the form of worship activities and practicing teachings. Fifth, the location of the building in the front area so that it presents a diverse life-world with the presence

of public visitors. Sixth, the prayer hall is the main public worship building. Seventh, the *pelataran* and *emperan* as gathering points that present a mixed atmosphere of countryside and urban during the celebration period of Asalha Puja and Vesakha Puja.

3.2. Research Methods

This research is qualitative and uses a natural setting approach. The research method is a description of the architecture that leads to a “thick description” and interpretive reflectiveness. This method is in line with the thoughts of Clifford Geertz (2017) in understanding the web of meaning (see fig. 5).

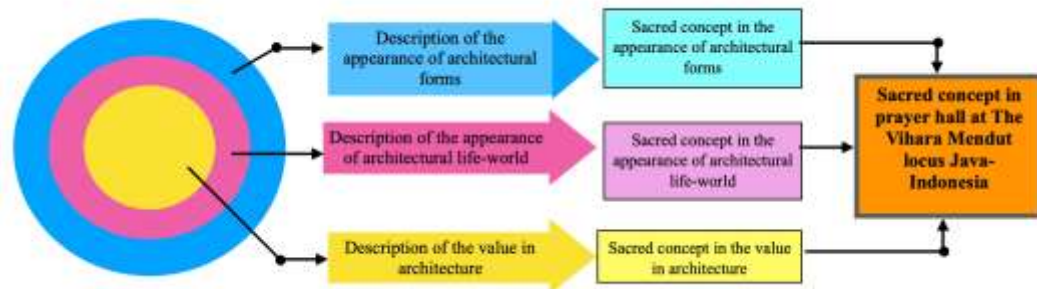


Fig. 5: Onion Diagram for the Concept of Sacredness Search
(Clifford Geertz's elaboration of the so-called Onion Thick Description)

Source: Author

Data collection is based on the time horizon, namely the ordinary period (i.e. the time of day and night) and the celebration period (including Vesakha Puja, Asalha Puja). The data collection techniques are reference studies and field studies. Reference studies take the form of tracing the concepts and theories of religious architecture and prayer hall within the scope of Theravada Buddhist architecture, concepts and theories of Javanese locality architecture, references to doctrines and beliefs of Theravada Buddhism, and references to Vihara Mendut. Field studies were made in the form of observations on each time horizon, interviews, and taking documentation. The interview is taken from respondents, namely: the head of the Vihara Mendut as well as the founder, architect, occupant of the *vihara*, and religious people. The field data consist of researcher notes in the form of architectural experience, data taken from interviews, photos, video recordings, and two-dimensional and three-dimensional architectural depictions. The drawing technique uses AutoCAD and SketchUp programs which are used for the analysis process.

The analytical step based on the onion diagram is to describe the architecture as it presents itself. The limitation of the case study is the prayer hall. This researcher describes it in three layers (see fig.5). The first layer is the appearance of architectural forms which describes (1) the body of the building which consists of the body structure of the building, attached and complementary ornaments, and the appearance of the building by the presence of light; (2) the interior which consists of the structure of the inner space, *puja* objects, manifestation of holiness (relics), and *piranti puja* (devices used for worshipping). The second layer is the appearance of architectural life-world which consists of behavior and traditions, fragrances of *piranti puja*, “colors” of atmosphere, movement, community (i.e. individual or groups), and sound. The third layer is the values in architecture that are attached to the forms and the life-world. Each part of the layer will bring up an understanding of the concept of sacredness. The research synthesis is the elaboration of sacred abstract ideas that contain a blend and refer to Javanese philosophy as a form of prioritizing local values. The conclusion is finding the essence of the concept of sacredness in the prayer hall at Vihara Mendut whose *locus* is the island of Java in Indonesia.

4. Findings and the Discussion

4.1. Sacredness in the appearance of architectural forms

The prayer hall has a body structure with a pyramidal roof and semi-open walls with a combination of transparent glass planes and massive walls. The base field has a character with no pit. The roof of the building is a transformation of the *tajug* roof shape as a characteristic of sacred buildings in Javanese architecture. This roof shows that its elegance dominates the entire body. The semi-open character walls with the use of transparent glass are a form of *omah tajug* that blends with modernity. Glass walls present a room that is visually open but has physical limitations as a marker for a more private space. The removal of the pit in the prayer hall is reminiscent of Javanese architecture from the classical era of the Majapahit kingdom (13th-16th century AD). Overall, the body structure of prayer hall presents the concept of Javanese locality which has an identity but open to modernity in manifesting its sacredness (see fig.6)



Fig. 6: Javanese Architecture and the Body of Architecture in the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

The ornaments attached to the prayer hall enclosure are Buddhist art forms that symbolize the faith of Theravada Buddhism. The roof crown is decorated with three-tiered umbrella ornaments with a bronze texture. This is the *kemuncak* of Javanese architecture presented in the form of Buddhist art, namely *chatra* (fig.7D). The fascia of the roof is decorated with dwarf-shaped human ornaments, namely *gana* in classic Javanese style (fig.7E). The walls are decorated with ornaments including (1) *Dhammacakka* with 30 spokes framed by *kala-makara* niches (fig. 7L); (2) “Three Jewels” framed with *kala-makara* niches (fig.7I); (3) *Dhammacakka* with 12 spokes - “Bodhi Leaves” - “Umbrella of Majesty” framed by *kala-makara* niches (fig. 7K); (4) *Stupa* and *Dhammacakka* of 8 radius surrounded by *kala-makara* niches (fig.7H); (5) *Kinnara-Kinnari* glass mosaic (fig. 7J); and (6) a *Paduma* Lotus flower glass mosaic (fig.7G and 7M). The ornaments have the concept of dressing the *façade* of Javanese architecture that presents Buddhist art. Overall, it is attached to the body of the building to present the concept of Javanese locality which is respectful towards the virtues of the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism (see fig.7).

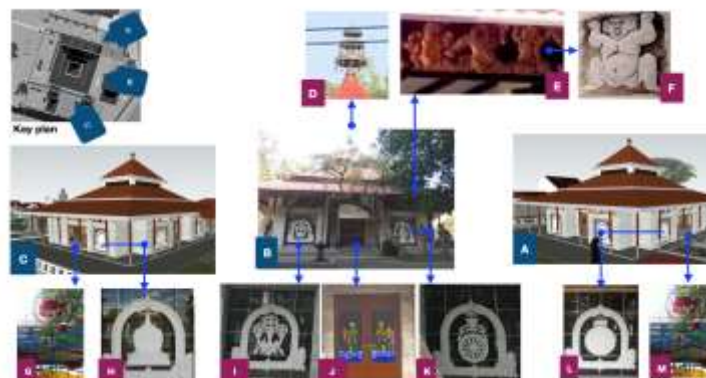


Fig.7: Attached *Façade* Ornament in the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut
Source: Author

Complementary ornaments on the enclosure of the prayer hall building are Buddhist art that symbolizes the faith of the Theravada Buddhism. The complementary ornament arrangement displays the concept of *façade* dressing that resembles Buddhist *candi* in the classical Java era. The Buddha statue in royal dress with local Javanese natural stone textures (fig. 8B and 8C) is a Lopburi-Khmer Buddha style (fig. 8D). The arrangement of a pair of Buddha statues is symmetrical on the left and right corners of the building. Furthermore, a pair of “guardian lions” statues with local Javanese natural stone textures are placed in the front of the entrance (fig. 8F). The arrangement of the “guardian lions” statues is symmetrical in pairs. It uses the attributes of the Khmer royal tradition of the 1000-1100 AD period (fig.8G). Overall, the complementary ornaments present the concept of Javanese locality which accepts the diversity of styles from various countries where Theravada Buddhism has spread. This is a concept of eclectic Javanese locality in manifesting sacredness.



Fig. 8: Complementary ornament in the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut
Source: Author

The bright sky covers the appearance of the prayer hall building, bringing out the dark shadows of the interior. Thus, the *façade* of the building is clearly defined. When the sky is dark, the dominance of artificial light from the interior penetrates the transparent glass wall perfectly. The silhouette of the building is highlighted with the absence of detail on the face of the building at night. The contrast of visual textures is a manifestation of the combination of natural and man-made elements (fig.9). The appearance of the building is defined by its sacredness by artificial light and natural light. This is the concept of Javanese natural locality that comes with a man-made environment that displays symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism with the aim of beautifying one another.



Fig. 9: Natural and Man-made Elements on the *Façade* of the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut
Source: Author

The design principle of the interior of the prayer hall has a bilateral symmetry axis balance that binds its constituent elements. The *emperan*, portal, hall, and altar area are the elements that construct the interior (fig.10). The imaginary axis represents the relationship between the portals to the center point of the altar area. The prayer hall plan is a combination of a cruciform and a square. The elevation of the floor in the altar area conveys the significance of the sacred area. The interior is surrounded by a transitional space, namely the *emperan*. The

interior has the concept of *ndalem* (a metaphorical term from home) which is a sacred and private character. The *pelataran* (courtyard) that surrounds the interior has profane and public character. *Emperan* is the in-between space between the *ndalem* and *pelataran*. The principle of the sacred-profane hierarchy is similar to the classical Javanese architectural order in Buddhist *candi* surrounded by a *pelataran*. The shape of the high ceiling and a rising-upward conical form creates a monumental scale. This shows a modern common rafter exposure (fig.10c). The hall functions for congregational worship by the removal of columns. Thus, giving an airy and modern impression. Overall, the interior structure displays the concept of Javanese locality which has an identity but is open to modernity in manifesting its sacredness.

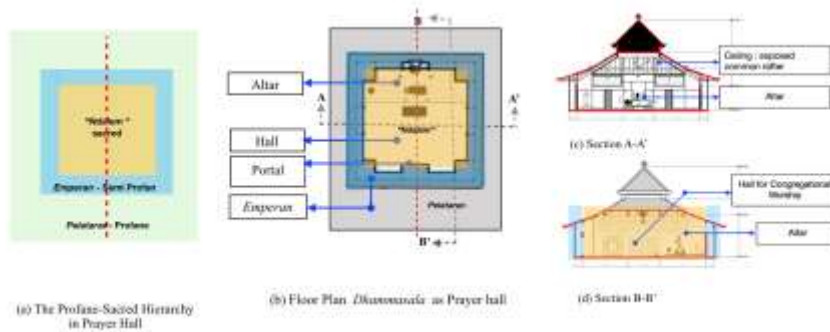


Fig.10: Interior Elements of the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

Source: Author

The main object of *puja* (worship) in the altar area is the statue of Gotama Buddha. The reclining Gotama Buddha statue is textured with local Javanese andesite stone employing a Javanese style. This statue has a monumental dimension and is covered in gold silk so that its existence becomes a point of interest in the room. Inside the statue are stored the relics of *nibbānadhātu* (the sphere of *nibbāna*). The hidden relic represents the sacredness of “the non-self.” “Buddha and his disciples” statues as *puja* objects in Thai style are placed in this niche. Next, the statue of Gotama Buddha in *padmasana* (a sitting meditation pose with legs crossed) with the hands of the *dhammacakka mudra* enthroned in the altar area. This *puja* object has a Javanese style image (having the posture and face of a Javanese person) and has a gold visual texture similar to the visual texture of a Buddha statue in a Thai style. The “Buddha's footprints” statue having the style of the countries where Theravada Buddhism has spread (except Indonesia) is placed in the altar area and it has a gold visual texture. The form of the *puja* object in Javanese style image presents the concept of Javanese locality which is respectful towards the virtues of the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism. The form of the *puja* object having the style from various countries where Theravada Buddhism has spread (except Indonesia), presents the concept of eclectic Javanese locality.

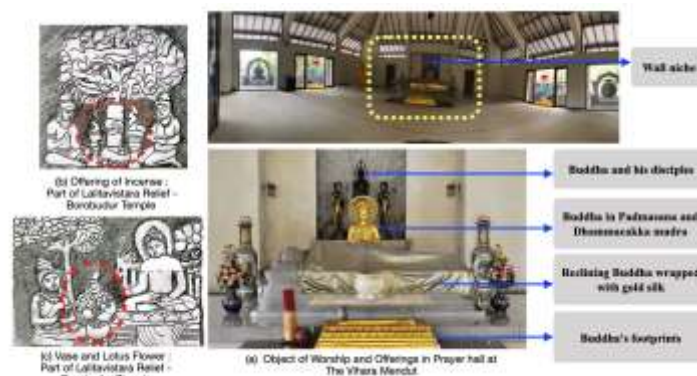


Fig. 11: Objects of Worship and Offering in Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

Source: Author

Piranti puja (devices used for worshipping) and altars as markers of holiness that exist and are present in the altar area. The various kinds of *piranti puja* include incense, flowers, candles, lamps, and *khata* (silk scarf offering). The *piranti puja* has a concept of Theravada Buddhism tradition. The form of *piranti puja* has a typical style of Javanese locality, various countries where Theravada Buddhism has spread, and modernity. The form of the *piranti puja* (including lotus vases and incense sticks) and the altar are similar to the classical Javanese Buddhist tradition depicted in the reliefs at Candi Borobudur (see fig.11b and 11.c). The *piranti puja* and altar features the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism, and modernity.

4.2. Sacredness in the Appearance of Architectural Life-World

In ordinary times and during celebrations, the prayer hall functions for *puja* and meditation activities in silence and order. Rituals of *puja* include: *anjali* (a hand gesture that meets two hands), *namaskara* (a prostration gesture), and offering incense while sitting on the floor (see fig.12). Positions for meditation include sitting cross-legged on the floor mat. Religious worshippers take off their shoes when they are in the inner room. The whole ritual manner and attitude shows the concept of vernacular Javanese locality by displaying respect and a sense of modesty in line with Theravada Buddhism.



Fig.12: Gesture of *Puja* in the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

Source: Author

The Life-world in the prayer hall features *puja* flowers and incense fragrances. The color of the space is characterized by unity within a variety. The golden color is the *datum* for the various colors displayed by the reflection of the inner surface of the inner sphere, *puja* objects, *puja* flowers, and *khata* (silk scarf offering). In ordinary times, the movements of religious people are ritually orderly and serene, performed in silence. Religious people who perform the rituals tend to do it in small groups or individuals. Outdoor local noise is reduced by the glass wall enclosure. The *pelataran* displays the calm and orderly manner of social behavior of tourists. Tourists appreciate the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism as limited to the *emperan*. This behavior is a form of respect for the existence of a worshiping area, although the main portal is always open until the evening on a regular basis (fig.13a). During the great celebration of *Vesakha Puja*, the *pelataran* displays the dynamic and lively social behavior of religious people and tourists. Communities of religious people from rural and urban areas, tourists, and local people mix to prepare for the celebration centered on the Candi Mendut. The *emperan* serves as a transitional area and a barrier between the crowd and serenity. This *emperan* is the most comfortable space to socialize in keeping with the vernacular Javanese locality. The space in the prayer hall presents a private and tranquil atmosphere shrouded in the dynamics of the *pelataran*. Silence is felt when the crowd surrounds it with a clear barrier (fig.13b). Overall, the life-world manifests the sacredness at all times by presenting a vernacular Javanese locality where the crowds come together with the serenity of Theravada Buddhism. This is a principle of balance in a paradoxical situation with clear boundaries.



Fig.13: Life-world in the *Pelataran* of the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

Source: Author

4.3. Sacredness of the Value in Architecture

Value in architecture is a spiritual message conveyed by the presence of religious architecture in the world. The body of the prayer hall building in the Javanese locality is a manifestation of the head-body-feet. The roof as the head represents the heavens, the prayer hall represents the human world, and the ground plane represents the underworld. The body of the building presents an imaginary axis as a connector of the three worlds. The value of the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism presents a prayer hall as a representation of the Buddha's body with an umbrella of honor. The crown of the roof, namely the *chatra*; is a representation of the umbrella of honor. The architectural value in the body of the building presents the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism (see fig.14).

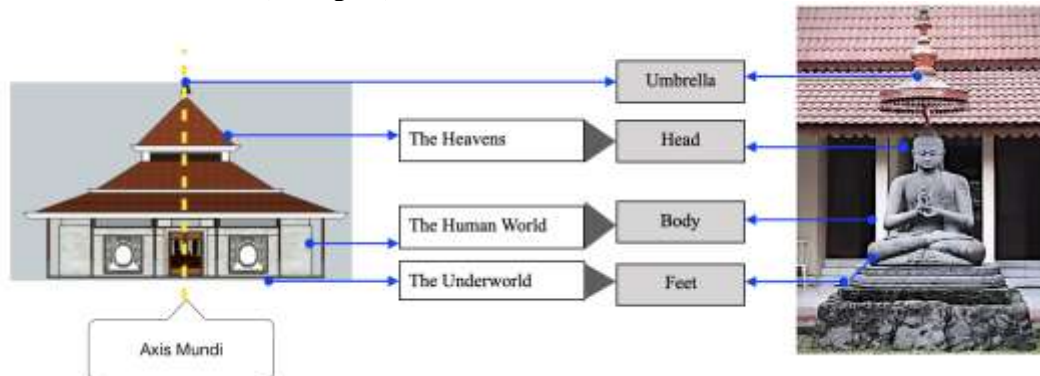


Fig.14: Value in the Body of Architecture of the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

Source: Author

Ornaments attached to the body of the building give a spiritual message. The *chatra* ornament on the *kemuncak* (the crown of the roof) symbolizes the umbrella of honor in Javanese locality values. *Chatra* ornament in the pre-iconic phase of Buddhism is a representation of the Buddha's protection. The *gana* (dwarf) ornament on the fascia symbolizes protection in the context of Javanese locality and Theravada Buddhism. Furthermore, the ornaments attached to the walls of the building tell the events of Gotama Buddha's life from the birth (symbol: lotus), attaining perfect enlightenment (symbol: *Bodhi* leaves), turning the wheel of *Dhamma* (symbol: *dhammacakka*), to Gotama Buddha's departure (symbol: *stupa*). All symbols of the life events of Gotama Buddha are framed by *kala-makara* as symbols of mythological creatures in Theravada Buddhism. Javanese locality defines it as "time as destiny". The *stupa* ornament in the Javanese locality is similar to *meru* as a place for the saints. *Dhammacakka* ornament in the Javanese locality is similar to *cakra manggilingan* as a life that is always in the process of attaining perfection. On the door is attached the *kinnara-kinnari* ornament (as a manifestation of mythological creatures of Theravada Buddhism) which stands for being gentle and joyful. This is a feminine character in Theravada Buddhism and the Javanese locality. The architectural

value in the attached ornaments presents the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism.

Complementary ornaments in the form of Gotama Buddha's statues with royal attributes present a message of manifestation of holiness which is symbolized as *Dewaraja* (god-king) as *Pangeran* (prince) in the Javanese locality. In the context of Theravada Buddhism, Gotama Buddha is symbolized as *cakkavatti*, namely *maharaja* (the great ruler of the perfect universe). Furthermore, the "guardian lion" statue with royal attributes is a mythological creature as a guardian of holiness in the Javanese locality. According to Theravada Buddhism, the lion is a manifestation of Gotama Buddha, namely the lion of the Sakya family. The lion is associated with the symbol of the kingdom, namely the *maharaja*. The architectural value in the complementary ornaments presents the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism.

The silhouette of the prayer hall building displays a mix of dark and light. It is a symbol of the spatial hierarchy where light stands for the heavens, while dark means the underworld. The human world is a meeting between light and dark as a point of encounter with holiness. This is the value of the Javanese locality. Theravada Buddhism speaks of light and darkness as the principle of balance in the world. The architectural value in the appearance of the building by the presence of light presents the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism.

Inside, in the interior prayer hall with the title *ndalem* (a metaphorical term for home) is a symbol of the "within me" Javanese man with a private-sacred character. The *pelataran* serves as the area surrounding the prayer hall is a manifestation of the *njaba* (outside world) with a public-profane character. This is the value of the Javanese locality. In the context of Theravada Buddhism, the interior symbolizes a holy life characterized by *sati* (mindfulness and awareness). The *pelataran* symbolizes the life of the outside world which is unmindful, unaware, and unenlightened. The architectural values in the interior and *pelataran* display the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism (see fig. 15).

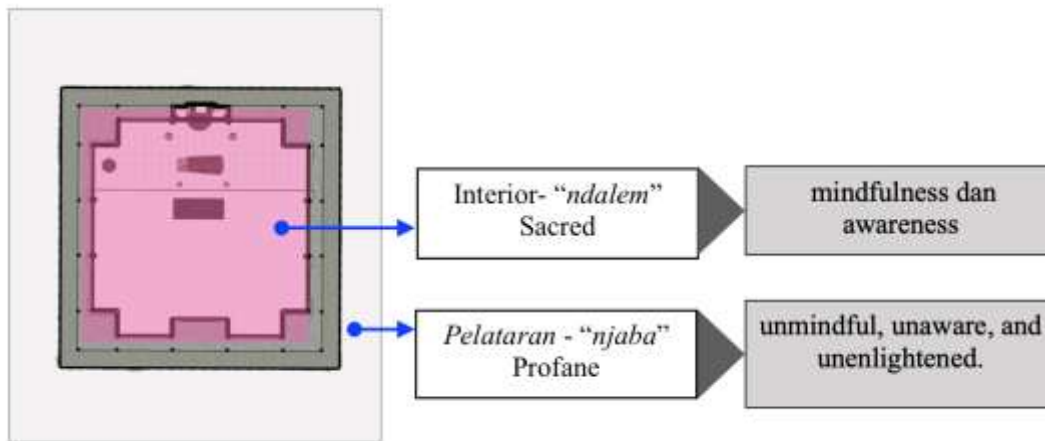


Fig. 15: Value in Interior-*Pelataran* of the Prayer Hall at Vihara Mendut

Source: Author

The object of *puja* in the form of Gotama Buddha statue is a manifestation of the patron *pamomong* (prophet) in the Javanese locality. A Javanese religious man living his life towards perfection requires the presence of a prophet who shows the way of life. The context of Theravada Buddhism, the statue of Gotama Buddha symbolizes the great teacher. The main object of *puja*, namely the reclining Gotama Buddha statue represents Gotama Buddha in the state of *parinibbana*. This particular state is a condition of letting go of *samsāra* (cycle of mundane existence and rebirth) which is the ultimate goal of life. Furthermore, the *piranti puja*

in Javanese locality are called *sesajen* (offerings) for the purpose of *ngelmu sejati* (the search of enlightenment). In the context of Theravada Buddhism, the *piranti puja* is a manifestation of offering and respect for Gotama Buddha. The architectural values in the *puja* object and *piranti puja* display the concept of Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism.

Life-world in the prayer hall shows the rituals of *puja* symbolizing respect and humility in the encounter with the manifestation of holiness. This is the value of Javanese locality which is similar to the values of Theravada Buddhism. Meditation in the Javanese locality has the term *manekung* as a manifestation of the combination of *nalar* (mindfulness) and *roso makarti* (reflective). In the context of Theravada Buddhism, meditation is a manifestation of the act of *sati* (awareness and mindfulness). Life-world in the *emperan* as a socializing space with the gesture sitting on the floor is a symbol of modesty and openness. This behavior is a vernacular Javanese locality identity. Values in architecture in the life-world present the concept of vernacular Javanese locality which is in harmony and envelops the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism.

4.4. Understanding of the Concept of Sacredness in Total Architecture

Based on the onion diagram, this study presents three layers of architecture as an understanding of total architecture. These three layers are form, life-world, and value. The context of the Javanese locality is the basis for understanding the concept of sacredness that is present in every layer of architecture. The Java *locus* played a major role in revealing the concept of sacredness in the prayer hall at Vihara Mendut.

The layer form presents an understanding of the concept of sacredness that refers to the Javanese philosophy. The first concept of sacredness is Javanese locality which has an identity but is open to modernity. The Javanese identity is the character of the “true I” Javanese human. This concept presents the Javanese philosophy of *sejatining diri* (awareness of self) which is always a process towards perfection. The second concept of sacredness is the Javanese locality which is respectful towards the virtues of the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism. This concept presents the Javanese philosophy of *ngluhuraké Pangeran* (glorifying God).

The third concept of sacredness is the eclectic Javanese locality particularly from the various countries where symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism spread. This concept presents the Javanese philosophy of *tepo seliro* (tolerance). The fourth concept of sacredness is Javanese natural locality that comes with a man-made environment that displays symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism for the purpose of beautifying each other. This concept of sacredness displays the Javanese philosophy, namely: *memayu hayuning bawana* (beautify the beautiful world). The fifth sacred concept is the Javanese locality that goes in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism, and modernity. This concept of sacredness presents the Javanese philosophy, namely the principle of *madya* (balance) for the purpose of harmony.

The life-world layer describes several understandings of the concept of sacredness that refers to Javanese philosophy. The first concept of sacredness is the vernacular Javanese locality by showing respect in a sense of modesty in harmony with Theravada Buddhism. This concept presents the Javanese philosophy, namely *ngelmu roso* (intuitive and reflective awareness) and *lembah manah lan andhap asor* (true humility). The second concept of sacredness is the vernacular Javanese locality where the crowds come together with serenity of Theravada Buddhism. This concept presents the principle of *madya* (balance) in a paradoxical situation with clear boundaries.

The value layer describes the concept of sacredness that refers to the Javanese philosophy. The first concept of sacredness is the Javanese locality in harmony with the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism. This concept is in line with the Javanese philosophy, namely the principle of *madya* (balance). The second concept of sacredness is the vernacular Javanese locality in harmony and envelops the symbols and traditions of Theravada Buddhism. This concept is in line with the Javanese philosophy of *madya* (balance).

5. Conclusions

The results of the discussion conclude that:

First, the concept of sacredness is clearly defined in three layers in religious architecture. The first layer is the form, the second layer is the life-world, and the third layer is the value. The context of Javanese locality is present as a spirit in the three layers of architecture. The whole concept of the sacred in the three layers displays the “architectural brilliance” of the Javanese locality.

Second, the concept of sacredness that presents the “architectural brilliance” of Javanese locality refers to the “true I”. The concept of sacredness in the prayer hall displays Javanese locality as an “I” who has an identity and open to modernity, “I” who respects virtue, “I” who is eclectic, “I” who is present with “other than me” to beautify the world, “I” who harmonize, and finally “I” who is vernacular but accepts modernity. This whole concept is a manifestation of the prayer hall at Vihara Mendut.

Third, the reflection of the concept of sacredness, namely the "true I" being a true sense of self that is without ego. This reflection leads to the essence of the concept of sacredness, namely *suwung* (emptiness) as a perfect self-control. *Suwung* has a congruence with *sunyata* in Theravada Buddhism. *Sunyata* which refers to the “non-self” is empty of an eternal identity because all forms are inter-related (constantly changing). Thus, the architecture of the prayer hall at Vihara Mendut, Java-Indonesia manifests the essence as a message of the value of life, which is emptiness of absolute “self”.

Author’s Contributions

This paper was written as part of an ongoing doctoral research at the *Universitas Katolik Parahyangan* (Parahyangan Catholic University), Bandung-Indonesia, supervised by Professor Josef Prijotomo and Professor Bambang Sugiharto.

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