

Javanese

also known as “Orang Djawa”, “Tijang Djawi”, “Wong Djawa”

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

** Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

** Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Religion, Syncretic Religions

The Javanese are Indonesia's largest ethnic group, and live primarily in East and Central Java (Martin, 2010). Java has a longtime history of contact with other cultures. Indian and Chinese influence and trade have been present since the eighth century, and have brought Islamic and Buddhist religious beliefs. The Dutch gained control over Java in the eighteenth century, which lasted until Indonesia gained sovereignty in 1949 (Martin, 2010). With such a variety of contact, the Javanese religious beliefs are, unsurprisingly, predominantly syncretic. Three main religious traditions are present: the santri (purer Islamic subtradition), the prijaji (mainly stresses Hindu beliefs), and the abangan (integration of animism, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic beliefs) (Geertz, 1960:5). This entry focuses on the syncretic beliefs of the abangan Javanese. It is important to stress the variation and complexity of spiritual life in Java, as Java is "not easily characterized under a single label or easily pictured in terms of a dominant theme. It is particularly true that in describing the religion of such a complex civilization as the Javanese any simple unitary view is certain to be inadequate..." (Geertz, 1960:7).



Date Range: 1930 CE - 1960 CE

Region: Town and environs of Pare

Region tags: Asia, Southeast Asia, Indonesia

Town and environs of Mojokerto, located in East Java, Indonesia. ca. 1955

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=oe05-018>

– Source 1 Description: Geertz, C. (1960). Religion Of Java. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

– Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=oe05-000>

– Source 2 Description: Martin, M. M. (2010). Culture Summary: Javanese. New Haven, Conn.: Human

Relations Area Files.

– Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=oe05-003>

– Source 3 Description: Jay, R. R. (1969). *Javanese Villagers: Social Relations In Rural Modjokuto*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "Java—which has been civilized longer than England; which over a period of more than fifteen hundred years has seen Indians, Arabs, Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch come and go; and which has today one of the world's densest populations, highest development of the arts, and most intensive agricultures—is not easily characterized under a single label or easily pictured in terms of a dominant theme" (Geertz, 1960:7).



Is the cultural contact accommodating/pluralistic:

– Yes

Notes: "...my intention has not been to deny the underlying religious unity of its people or, beyond them, of the Indonesian people generally, but to bring home the reality of the complexity, depth, and richness of their spiritual life" (Geertz, 1960:7).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649 (Frequency of Internal Warfare, Resolved Rating) indicates that "internal warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650 (Frequency of External Warfare, Resolved Rating) indicates that "external warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religion have official political support

Answer 'yes' also in cases where the religious and political spheres are not distinguished from one another, but the religious group's activities are tied up with, and supported by, the functioning of the society at large.

– No

Notes: The Javanese are a part of Indonesia's political administration. The government has the Ministry of Religion, which is charged with the "administration of all government regulations concerning

religion. Although there are Protestant, Roman Catholic, and 'Other Religions' sections, the Ministry of Religion is for all intents and purposes a santri [Islamic] affair from top to bottom" (Geertz, 1960:200). The religion of Islam, therefore has political support whereas the syncretic religion does not.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Notes: Because there is so much variation in the syncretic (abangan) beliefs of the Javanese, it is unlikely that there is a conception of apostasy. (See Geertz, 1960:7 for a description of such variation)

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: "...the town has a population of almost 20,000, of whom about 18,000 are Javanese, 1,800 Chinese, and the remainder a handful of Arabs, Indians, and other minorities" (Geertz, 1960:1). Because not all of the Javanese follow the same religion, and the religion is highly syncretic, it is difficult to estimate the number of adherents. An informed guess would be about 10,000 adherents, but it is impossible to know with certainty.

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The Javanese do not have a uniform religion. Many, but not all, are of the abangan subgroup (which this entry focuses on). Because there is so much variation in this highly syncretic belief system, it is impossible to determine exactly what percentage of the sample region adheres.

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– No

Notes: The abangan religious subgroup does not have an official, recognized leader. There are, however, religious specialists known as dukun. "There are many varieties of dukun, each one dealing with specialized kinds of ritual such as agricultural rituals, fertility rituals, etc. Dukun also perform divination and curing" (Martin, 2010). For a more detailed description of dukun, see Geertz, 1960:86-91.

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The Javanese religion consists of an integration of Islamic, animistic, and Hinduistic beliefs. The Islamic faith follows the Koran, and the Hindu faith follows the Vedas of India, but it is unclear how

these scriptures fit into the syncretic religion of Java. Because the religion is high varied, the importance of scripture presumably varies from individual to individual.

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: The abangan Javanese worship mainly at home, or at shrines. Monumental religious architecture is not present.

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for specific types of religious architecture among the Javanese.

↳ Cemeteries:

– Yes

Notes: "There are no communal village rituals ordinarily held at the graveyard. Its value to the village community derives from the attachment its families feel to the location of their close kinsmen's graves. Each year at the advent and at the end of the fasting month, when every family renews its spiritual ties with deceased close kin, the graveyard becomes a place of pilgrimage for all the families of the village" (Jay, 1969:330).

↳ Other type of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes [specify]: Shrine (pundèn)

Notes: "The generic term for a place of worship (of local spirits, not mosques) is pundèn, from pundi, 'to worship, revere.' In Modjokuto the villagers used it particularly to refer to the shrine of the spirit of the village's putative first settler, the 'first clearer of the land.' It is also used of a person's parents and sometimes of grandparents. These are conceived as that person's spiritual progenitors: before death the parent's body is the child's personal pundèn; after the parent's death his grave becomes the pundèn. In the same way the village pundèn is conceived as the burial place of the akal bakal. In some more recent villages historically important figures have been buried close by the pundèn, and their spirits have become identified with akal bakal. A pundèn, then, for most villagers is the locus of a spirit who is in some way the worshiper's progenitor; some villagers denied pundèn standing to other kinds of spirit shrines" (Jay, 1969:323).

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that

some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– I don't know

Notes: Minimal discussion of Javanese theories of spirit. Insufficient ethnographic information. See Geertz, 1960:75 for available information.

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "Three separate notions of life after death, again often held concurrently by the same individual, are present in Modjokuto. The first is the Islamic version of the concept of eternal retribution, of punishment and reward in the afterworld for the sins and good deeds in this one...Much more popular with abangans is the concept of sampurna, which means literally 'perfect' or 'complete' but which indicates in this context that the individual personality completely disappears after death and nothing is left of the person but dust...The third view, which is extremely widely held by all but santris, who condemn it as heretical, is the notion of reincarnation—that when a person dies his soul enters shortly thereafter into an embryo on its way to being born" (Geertz, 1960:75).

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– No

Reincarnation in this world:

– Yes

Notes: "The third view [of the afterlife], which is extremely widely held by all but santris, who condemn it as heretical, is the notion of reincarnation—that when a person dies his soul enters shortly thereafter into an embryo on its way to being born" (Geertz, 1960:75).

↳ In a human form:

– Yes

Notes: Geertz, 1960:75.

↳ In animal/plant form:

– Yes

Notes: Geertz, 1960:75.

↳ Reincarnation linked to notion of life-transcending causality (e.g. karma):

– No

Notes: "Sometimes people hold to the Hindu notion of advancement and regression in the stages of being according to one's deportment while alive; but most abangans leave this sort of thing to priajis to reflect upon and use the idea of reincarnation primarily to explain personal peculiarities in their children and strange behavior on the part of an odd animal now and then, such as dogs who fast, as humans often do, on Mondays and Thursdays" (Geertz, 1960:75).

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

↳ Interment:

– Yes

↳ Corpse is interred some other way:

– Yes [specify]: On side

Notes: "The body is taken off the litter and put into the grave on its side, being handed down to three men standing in the grave. The body is laid to rest on seven stones with its head pointed to the north. The strings on the shroud are loosened and the face exposed so that the cheek touches the earth, and then either the modin [religious leader] or some other santri jumps down into the grave and shouts the Confession of Faith three times into the dead man's ear. The planks are then laid in place, the dirt pushed into the grave, and the grave markers erected" (Geertz, 1960:71).

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

Are grave goods present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of grave goods.

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: See Geertz, 1960, pages 68-71 for a detailed account of Javanese burials.

↳ In cemetery:

– Yes

Notes: Corpses are buried in graveyards (Geertz, 1960:70).

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: The abangan Javanese spirit beliefs vary person to person, and include several different types of supernatural beings. Due to the high variation in such beliefs, it is difficult to answer questions about specific characteristics of these beings. See questions below for available information. "Abangan spirit beliefs in Modjokuto are not part of a consistent, systematic, and integrated scheme, but are rather a

set of concrete, specific, rather sharply defined discrete images—unconnected visual metaphors giving form to vague and otherwise incomprehensible experiences" (Geertz, 1960:17).

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 (Religion: High gods) indicates that a "high god absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: "...some anjangs are considered to be spirits of actual historic figures now deceased: the founders of the village to which they are attached, the men who were the first to mbabad (i.e., clear) the land. Each village usually has one major anjang" (Geertz, 1960:26).

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can punish:

– Yes

Notes: "Other spirits are believed to demand naughtier entertainment, for the characters of the founding spirits are conceived as no more morally elevated than the average run of powerful men. In fact, some of the spirits are considered djahat, 'evil,' because of the demands they make and the retribution they bring for failure to meet those demands" (Jay, 1969:325).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "Abangan spirit beliefs in Modjokuto are not part of a consistent, systematic, and integrated scheme, but are rather a set of concrete, specific, rather sharply defined discrete images—unconnected visual metaphors giving form to vague and otherwise incomprehensible experiences" (Geertz, 1960:17).

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:

– Yes [specify]: Lelembuts spirits can make people ill or drive them crazy

Notes: Geertz, 1960:16,19

– Yes [specify]: Memedis spirits are known to upset and scare people, but are usually harmless

Notes: Geertz, 1960:16-18

– Yes [specify]: Ujuls are non-human child spirits that generally help humans

Notes: Geertz, 1960:16-17,21

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: The principal ethnographer, Geertz, stresses the variation in names for and identification of spirits. If there is any organization present, it is by the spirits' functions (e.g. spirits that harm, spirits that possess, spirits that frighten, etc.).

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:

– No

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– No

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The abangan Javanese spirit beliefs vary person to person, and include several different types of supernatural beings. Due to the high variation in such beliefs, it is difficult to answer questions about specific characteristics of these beings, including questions about supernatural monitoring. "Abangan spirit beliefs in Modjokuto are not part of a consistent, systematic, and integrated scheme, but are rather a set of concrete, specific, rather sharply defined discrete images—unconnected visual metaphors giving form to vague and otherwise incomprehensible experiences" (Geertz, 1960:17).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– I don't know

Notes: Ethnographic examples of supernatural punishment (see Geertz, 1960:17, 75), but not enough information. Additionally, supernatural beliefs vary from individual to individual.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Is an eschatology present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of an eschatology.

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: When an informant was asked about his ideas on suicide, he responded: "That would be wrong because it would be from your own will. It is up to God to decide when you should die, not yourself. It is wrong to commit suicide because you are trying to take into your own hands affairs which are properly God's" (Geertz, 1960:74).

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the requirement of time sacrifice. The abangan practices are varied, and largely revolve around the slametan ritual.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– No

Notes: The slametan is not entirely mandatory, but is a key feature of Javanese religion. (Geertz, 1960:128).

– Yes

Notes: The slametan is not entirely mandatory, but is a key feature of Javanese religion. "For the

abangan the basic social unit to which nearly all ritual refers is the household—a man, his wife, and his children. It is the household which gives the slametan, and it is the heads of other households who come to attend it and then carry home part of the food to the other members of their families" (Geertz, 1960:128).



What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to small-scale rituals.

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– No

Notes: While not mandatory, the slametan ritual is a central feature of Javanese religion. (Geertz, 1960:11).

– Yes

Notes: While not mandatory, the slametan ritual is a central feature of Javanese religion. "At the center of the whole Javanese religious system lies a simple, formal, undramatic, almost furtive, little ritual: the slametan (also sometimes called a kenurèn). The slametan is the Javanese version of what is perhaps the world's most common religious ritual, the communal feast, and, as almost everywhere, it symbolizes the mystic and social unity of those participating in it" (Geertz, 1960:11).

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

This question refers to the wider society in which the religious group is located.

– A state

Notes: The Javanese society (as a whole) has four levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is indicative of a large state (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– Yes

Notes: "...there is still a number of old-style religious schools in the area which have recently been semi-modernized" (Geertz, 1960:4).

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than

the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "In Modjokuto there are a half dozen six-grade government elementary schools, a government technical school at the junior high level, three private junior high schools, a government school for elementary teachers, and scattered other private schools including Chinese and Catholic elementary schools" (Geertz, 1960:4).

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

– No

Notes: There is no bureaucracy within the abangan Javanese.

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

Notes: The Javanese interact with a government bureaucracy. It does not appear that the abangan religious system is bureaucratic in nature. "The bureaucratic character of the central government administration is quite rigid" (Jay, 1969:345).

Public Works

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "Offices concerned with the repair of roadways, the building and maintenance of irrigation systems, the improvement of agriculture, and the administration of the market further swell the total of white-collar workers employed or underemployed by the government..." (Geertz, 1960:4).

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "Offices concerned with the repair of roadways, the building and maintenance of irrigation systems, the improvement of agriculture, and the administration of the market further swell the total of white-collar workers employed or underemployed by the government..." (Geertz, 1960:4).

Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– No

Notes: There is no formal leadership among the abangan Javanese, so it can be assumed that taxes and tithes are not levied.

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "The central government levies taxes in money from the villagers on certain major items of production" (Jay, 1969:372).

Enforcement

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "...the regional headquarters of the central government police force is in Modjokuto..." (Geertz, 1960:4).

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Government judicial system. "The judiciary is represented down to the regency level, with a circuit court judge making rounds to the districts" (Jay, 1969:344).

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Because the government has a formal judicial and police system, it can be assumed that a formal legal code is also present (see Jay, 1969:344).

Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– No

Notes: The Javanese have adopted the Islamic lunar calendar (Geertz, 1960:77).

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The Javanese have adopted the Islamic lunar calendar (Geertz, 1960:77).

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: The Javanese are intensive agriculturalists with a secondary reliance on animal husbandry. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Pastoralism

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.