

MEGENGAN RITUAL: TRACING EXISTENTIAL MEANING IN JAVANESE CULTURE THROUGH PHILOSOPHY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract

Megengan is not just a ritual, but a process of internalization of deep religious and moral values, which is reflected in the daily attitudes and actions of Javanese people during Ramadan. This tradition begins with various preparations such as cleaning themselves, houses, and the surrounding environment, symbolizing the cleansing of the body and soul in order to welcome the holy month with a pure heart and a calm heart. They may also prepare and distribute special food called apem, which symbolizes apology and forgiveness, in accordance with the Javanese philosophy of harmony. This ritual combines religious elements and traditional Javanese values, strengthening social bonds and a sense of community, as well as self-reflection to find a balance between secular and spiritual needs. Values such as unity, harmony and self-control are deeply embedded in this tradition and we can see how the younger generation is taught to value and preserve cultural heritage. This study analyzes the existential meaning of the Megengan ritual through an anthropological-philosophical approach, reveals the philosophical and spiritual values in the practice of Megengan, and examines the role of Megengan in the formation of cultural identity of the role played by Javanese society. The research findings reveal the deep existential meaning of Megengang, how this ritual helps individuals find the meaning of life and self-identity, and serves as a means to preserve and strengthen the Javanese cultural identity that is expected to be displayed.

Keywords

Megengan; Java tradition; Philosophy of Anthropology

Abstrak

Megengan bukan sekedar ritual, namun merupakan proses internalisasi nilai-nilai keagamaan dan moral yang mendalam, yang tercermin dalam sikap dan tindakan sehari-hari masyarakat Jawa selama Rama-

dhan. Tradisi ini diawali dengan berbagai persiapan seperti membersihkan diri, rumah, dan lingkungan sekitar, melambungkan pembersihan jiwa dan raga dalam rangka menyambut bulan suci dengan hati yang suci dan hati yang tenang. Mereka juga dapat menyiapkan dan membagikan makanan khusus yang disebut apem, yang melambungkan permintaan maaf dan pengampunan, sesuai dengan filosofi Jawa tentang kerukunan dan keharmonisan. Ritual ini memadukan unsur keagamaan dan nilai-nilai tradisional Jawa, memperkuat ikatan sosial dan rasa kebersamaan, serta melakukan refleksi diri untuk menemukan keseimbangan antara kebutuhan sekuler dan spiritual. Nilai-nilai seperti persatuan, kerukunan, dan pengendalian diri sangat kental dalam tradisi ini dan kita bisa melihat bagaimana generasi muda diajarkan untuk menghargai dan melestarikan warisan budaya. Kajian ini menganalisis makna eksistensial ritual Megengan melalui pendekatan antropologis-filosofis, mengungkap nilai-nilai filosofis dan spiritual dalam praktik Megengan, serta mengkaji peran Megengan dalam pembentukan identitas budaya peran yang dimainkan oleh masyarakat Jawa. Temuan penelitian mengungkap makna eksistensial Megengan yang mendalam, ritual ini membantu individu menemukan makna hidup dan identitas diri, serta berfungsi sebagai sarana untuk melestarikan dan memperkuat identitas budaya Jawa yang diharapkan dapat ditampilkan.

Kata Kunci

Megengan; Tradisi Jawa; Filsafat Antropologi

Introduction

The Megengan ritual is one of the traditions that is rich in meaning in Javanese culture, especially those carried out ahead of the holy month of Ramadan. This tradition comes from the word "megeng" which means restraint or self-control. (Shufya, 2022) The meaning of this word is very relevant to the spiritual and physical preparation of the Javanese people before entering the fasting month. Megengan is not only a ritual, but also describes the process of internalizing deep religious and moral values, which is reflected in the daily attitudes and behaviors of the Javanese people during Ramadan. (Wardhani, 2023)

This ritual usually begins with various preparations, such as cleaning yourself, your home, and your surroundings. It symbolizes the cleansing of the birth and mind, preparing oneself to welcome the holy month with a clean heart and a calm mind. In addition, in the Megengan tradition, people also make and distribute special food called

'apem'. Apem itself symbolizes apology and forgiveness and from the Arabic word "Afwan", (Ashar, 2022) in accordance with the Javanese philosophy that prioritizes harmony and harmony in relationships between individuals and with God. (Puspitasari et al., 2022) Although many studies have been conducted on the Megengan tradition, most of these studies are more descriptive and historical. (Erkham Maskuri, 2023) These studies usually focus on the visual and ritualistic aspects of Megengan, such as the type of food prepared, the procedures for its implementation, and the history of its development over time. (Asmariati, 2023) However, a more in-depth study of the philosophical and anthropological dimensions of Megengan is still rare. This creates a significant research gap, especially in connecting Megengan with concepts in anthropological philosophy.

In the context of anthropological philosophy, Megengan can be seen as a reflection of the search for meaning of life by the Javanese people. This ritual is an expression of a rich and complex cultural identity, which combines religious elements with traditional Javanese values. Through Megengan, the community not only strengthens social ties and togetherness, but also conducts self-introspection, seeking a balance between worldly and spiritual needs. This is in line with concepts in anthropological philosophy that emphasize the importance of harmony and balance in human life. (Kremen & Ilin, 2022) In addition, Megengan also reflects deep spiritual values in Javanese culture. Values such as togetherness, harmony, and self-control are very thick in this tradition. (Sobaya et al., 2023) In an anthropological view, these values are an integral part of cultural identity that is inherited from generation to generation. (Ralph, 2022) Through Megengan, the younger generation is taught to appreciate and preserve their cultural heritage, as well as understand the spiritual meaning contained in it. This is important to maintain the sustainability of culture and moral values in society.

Thus, a more in-depth analysis of Megengan will not only enrich one's understanding of this tradition, but also provide new insights into how concepts in anthropological philosophy can be applied in the context of local cultures. Research that connects Megengan with the meaning of life, cultural identity, and spiritual values will open up new

perspectives on the role of rituals in the daily lives of the Javanese people. It will also help bridge existing research gaps, making significant contributions in the fields of anthropology and philosophy studies.

The Megengan ritual is not only a tradition ahead of Ramadan, but also a deep spiritual process. More in-depth and analytical research on Megengan is needed to uncover its philosophical and anthropological dimensions. Thus, one can better understand how this tradition reflects the cultural identity and spiritual values of the Javanese people, as well as its contribution to our understanding of the meaning of life and balance in human life.

Koentjaraningrat (1985), in his book "Javanese Culture," explains various aspects of Javanese traditional traditions and ceremonies, including Megengan. He highlighted the importance of Megengan as part of an annual cycle rich in cultural and social meaning. However, his research tends to be more descriptive without alluding to in-depth philosophical analysis. Clifford Geertz (1960), in his work "The Religion of Java," also investigated various religious practices in Java, including rituals leading up to Ramadan. Geertz highlights the importance of these ceremonies in strengthening community solidarity and cultural identity, but goes into less depth of the existential aspects of these rituals.

In contrast, Hildred Geertz (1963) in "The Javanese Family: A Study of Kinship and Socialization" examines the role of family and community in Javanese rituals and traditions. He discussed how Megengan strengthens social bonds through shared celebrations and sharing of food, providing insight into the social and cultural significance of these rituals. Franz Magnis-Suseno (1997) in his book "Javanese Ethics" describes how rituals such as Megengan contain profound ethical values that direct the social and spiritual behavior of Javanese people, but again, lack of emphasis on existential meaning.

In the context of anthropological philosophy, Victor Turner (1969) through his work "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure" discusses the concept of liminality and commitment in ritual. His work is relevant to understanding how Megengan functions as a transitional time that renews the social structure and identity of individuals. Mircea Eliade (1959) in "The Sacred and The Profane"

describes how rituals connect humans with the sacred and give existential meaning, helping in understanding the deep meaning of Megengan for the Javanese.

The study of existentialism in a cultural context also provides a strong theoretical foundation. Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) in "Being and Nothingness" discusses the concepts of freedom, consciousness, and the creation of meaning by the individual. Although not specific about Javanese culture, these concepts can be applied to analyze how participation in Megengan helps individuals find meaning in life. Martin Heidegger (1927) in "Being and Time" explores the concept of existence (Dasein) and the meaning of life lived, providing a framework for understanding how the Javanese through Megengan relate to themselves and the world around them.

In relation to cultural identity, Anthony Giddens (1991) in "Modernity and Self-Identity" discusses how tradition and ritual play an important role in the formation of identity in the modern era. This perspective helps explain the relevance of Megengan in strengthening Javanese cultural identity in the context of globalization. Edward Said (1978) in "Orientalism" criticizes the Western way of looking at the East, providing insights into relevant representations of culture and identity to understand how rituals such as Megengan are maintained and perceived in postcolonial contexts.

The analysis of the gap in the problem that will be raised in this study includes, how the Megengan ritual reflects existential values in Javanese culture, what is the philosophical meaning behind the implementation of Megengan in the context of cultural anthropology, how participation in Megengan affects the identity and self-awareness of the Javanese people, and what is the role of Megengan in maintaining and transmitting Javanese cultural values to the next generation. These questions will be a guide in delving deeper into the meaning and impact of the Megengan ritual.

The focus of this research is to analyze the existential meaning contained in Megengan rituals through an anthropological philosophical approach, uncover the philosophical and spiritual values embodied in Megengan practice and its relevance to Javanese society, understand how Megengan plays a role in the formation of cultural

identity and self-awareness of the Javanese community, and explore how Megengan contributes to social dynamics and community cohesion in society Javanese.

Applying concepts from anthropological philosophy, such as liminality by Victor Turner and relationship to the sacred by Mircea Eliade, this research provides new insights into how Megengan helps the Javanese people achieve a balance between temporal and spiritual needs. It also shows how these rituals can serve as a reflection of the identity and meaning of an individual's life within their community.

From this perspective, it is hoped that it can provide a deeper understanding of the importance of spiritual and cultural values in the development of the life of the Javanese people. This research also highlights how the philosophical view of anthropology can influence and enrich our understanding of the implementation of cultural rituals in modern contexts. Thus, this study aims to offer practical guidance for the Javanese people in interpreting and carrying out the Megengan ritual in a more ethical and responsible manner. It also makes a significant contribution to the literature of anthropological philosophy, enriching the study of the role of ritual in human life, as well as showing how cultural traditions can shape and strengthen individual and collective identities.

The research findings are expected to reveal the deep existential meanings of Megengan, including how these rituals help individuals find meaning in life and their self-identity. This research is also expected to discover how Megengan functions as a means to maintain and strengthen Javanese cultural identity, as well as how this ritual is internalized by individuals in the community. The social impact of Megengan in strengthening community relations and transmitting cultural values to the next generation will also be identified. In addition, the cultural values implied in the implementation of Megengan and its relevance in the modern context will be revealed. Finally, this research is expected to contribute to the literature on anthropological philosophy by providing an in-depth analysis of cultural rituals that have been underpaid from a philosophical perspective.

By tracing these thoughts, researchers obtain a strong theoretical basis for analyzing Megengan in the context of anthropological

philosophy, as well as uncovering the existential meaning and cultural identity associated with this ritual. This research is expected not only to provide new insights into the Megengan tradition, but also to enrich our understanding of how cultural rituals can function as a reflection and the formation of identity and meaning of life for the people who carry them out.

This research uses a qualitative method of data collection carried out through literature research, which involves an in-depth study of related literature, to explore the existential and philosophical meaning of the Megengan ritual. Through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and text analysis, this study succeeded in revealing how Megengan reflects the efforts of the Javanese people in finding and understanding the meaning of life, strengthening cultural identity, and achieving a balance between worldly and spiritual needs. The results of this study make an important contribution to the study of anthropological philosophy and enrich our understanding of the role of ritual in human life.

Case study to understand the application of the concept of anthropological philosophy in real-world situations, especially through the Megengan ritual. This case study explores how Megengan, as a cultural ritual, reflects ethical and moral values in Javanese society. Through this approach, research examines how these rituals function in various contexts of people's lives, such as spiritual preparation before Ramadan, self-control, and the formation of cultural identity. Through in-depth data analysis, this study seeks to uncover the existential meaning contained in Megengan. This ritual is not only a forum for self-reflection and introspection, but also a means to strengthen social and spiritual ties in Javanese society. This research highlights the importance of theology in the implementation of Megengan and how cultural and spiritual values are inherited and practiced in daily life

Existential Meaning in Megengan Ritual

Reflection on the Search for the Meaning of Life The results of the study show that Megengan reflects the efforts of the Javanese people in finding and understanding the meaning of life. This ritual invites individuals to introspect themselves, control worldly desires, and

prepare themselves spiritually ahead of Ramadan. This process fosters a deep awareness of the importance of self-control and mental and physical preparation. The Concept of Liminality and Commitment (Victor Turner) Megengan serves as a transitional time (liminality) that updates the social structure and identity of individuals.(Mueller-Greene, 2022) These rituals emphasize the individual's commitment to spiritual and cultural values, strengthening social ties and cultural identity.

Internalization of Religious and Moral Values Megengan plays a role as a medium for internalizing religious and moral values. Values such as self-control, apology, and togetherness are internalized in the practice of self-cleaning, the environment, and the making and distribution of 'apem'. Apem symbolizes apology and forgiveness, in accordance with the Javanese philosophy that prioritizes harmony. Relationship with the Sacred (Mircea Eliade) Megengan connects humans to the sacred, giving them existential meaning and helping individuals understand their existence in a spiritual context.(Rennie, 2007) Through this ritual, people feel closeness to the divine and gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of life. Freedom and Consciousness (Jean-Paul Sartre) Participation in Megengan is a form of individual freedom and awareness in creating the meaning of their lives.(Ashworth, 2023) This ritual encourages individuals to take responsibility for their actions and the meaning of their lives, making them more aware of their role in the community. The Existence and Meaning of Life (Martin Heidegger) Megengan helps individuals to understand and appreciate their existence (Dasein), finding the meaning of life through connection with oneself and the world around them.(Van Inwagen, 2022) This ritual provides space for individuals to reflect on their existence and find balance in life.

The Philosophical and Spiritual Meaning of Megengan in the Context of Cultural Anthropology

The Megengan ritual is one of the traditions in Javanese culture that emphasizes the importance of harmony and balance between worldly and spiritual needs.(Lomas, 2021) In an anthropological perspective, this balance is the essence of a balanced and harmonious

human life. The physical and spiritual preparations made before Ramadan are a concrete manifestation of the Javanese people's efforts to achieve harmony. In Javanese culture, Megengan is not only seen as a preparation for welcoming the month of Ramadan, but also as a manifestation of deep spiritual values. These values include togetherness, harmony, and self-control, all of which are passed down from generation to generation. This process strengthens the Javanese cultural identity which is rich in noble values.

Togetherness in Megengan is reflected in the way the community gathers and shares, both in the form of food and prayer, the Javanese term is called "kirim dungo for village elders and sederek sedoyo". This tradition teaches the importance of solidarity and mutual support among others. Through togetherness, the Javanese people strengthen their social ties, which are the foundation for a harmonious and balanced life.(Mibtadin, 2023) Harmony is another aspect emphasized in the Megengan ritual. Javanese society tries to create a humanist relationship with others, the environment, and God. This harmony is not only a form of social connection, but also a form of deep spiritual appreciation. By maintaining harmony, the Javanese people show their commitment to peace and harmony.



Figure 1: Send Megengan prayers

Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/WThGtCiF3RYBWdZH6>

Self-control is an important value taught through Megengan. In preparation for welcoming Ramadan, people are taught to control their

passions and emotions, which is part of the effort to achieve spiritual balance.(Batrisyia & Rivauzi, 2023) This self-control becomes the basis for a more disciplined and moral values-oriented life.(Huda, t.t.) The Megengan ritual is also a means for the Javanese people to explore the spiritual meaning of their traditions. Through various activities carried out, they are invited to reflect on the meaning of life and their relationship with God. This is a time for them to strengthen their faith and gain inner peace.

Thus, Megengan is not only a tradition ahead of Ramadan, but also a deep spiritual journey. Through Megengan, the Javanese people strengthen their cultural identity, uphold the values of togetherness, harmony, and self-control, and seek a balance between worldly and spiritual needs. This ritual is a reflection of a harmonious and balanced philosophy of life, in accordance with the teachings of anthropology about the importance of balance in human life.

Implications for Anthropological Philosophy

Research on Megengan rituals has made a significant contribution to the literature of anthropological philosophy. By providing an in-depth analysis of Megengan, this study opens up new insights into the view that a cultural ritual can function as a reflection and the formation of identity and the meaning of life in Javanese society. This ritual shows the entire Javanese people balancing their worldly and spiritual needs,(Wulandari & Prihantoro, 2020) which is an important topic in the philosophy of anthropology. The study of Megengan enriches one's understanding of the concept of harmony and balance in human life.(Dewi et al., 2010) In the context of anthropology, this ritual underscores the importance of a balance between the material and spiritual aspects, which is often a central theme in anthropological and philosophical research. Thus, Megengan is a concrete example of anthropological theory that can be applied in understanding the dynamics of people's lives.

This research not only contributes to the literature on anthropological philosophy but also provides broader insights into the study of anthropology in general. An in-depth analysis of Megengan helps researchers understand the role of ritual in shaping the cultural

identity and meaning of life of the Javanese people.(Irsyada, 2023) Through this ritual, it is clear that there is an existence of spiritual and social values inherited and practiced in daily life. The Megengan ritual shows that the Javanese people interpret their lives through cultural traditions and practices, usually before the "kirim dungo" event a person will visit and clean the graves of family and relatives. This shows that people introspect themselves that in every life there is a time to return to "Gusti kang Dumadi" as the Javanese people call it. It enriches the study of anthropology by providing concrete examples of how culture and ritual can influence and shape individual and collective identities. This study also highlights how tradition can function as a means to strengthen social and spiritual ties in society, empirically Javanese people are more likely to like "grafting" to be seen during celebrations and after worship usually take advantage of time to interact with each other.



Figure 2: Cleaning and Cleaning the Family Grave

Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/vWE6D9MKn95pBLnJ6>

This research opens up a new perspective on the role of rituals such as Megengan in the daily life of the Javanese people. This ritual is not only seen as a preparation for welcoming Ramadan but also as a manifestation of deep spiritual and social values.(Komarudin & Rohmah, 2022) Through Megengan, the Javanese people learn about the importance of togetherness, harmony, and self-control, all of which are important aspects of their lives. By researching Megengan, the

community gained new insights into rituals that could help bridge the gap in existing anthropological research.(Ahmadi & Kurniawati, 2022) This ritual shows that cultural and spiritual values can serve as a guide in daily life, helping the Javanese people to achieve balance and harmony. It enriches our understanding of the relationship between ritual, cultural identity, and the meaning of life.

The Megengan ritual plays an important role in the formation and reflection of the cultural identity of the Javanese people. Through this ritual practice, the values of togetherness, harmony, and self-control are inherited and practiced in daily life. It shows how cultural traditions can shape and strengthen a society's collective identity.(Jafar, 2022) Megengan also functions as a means to strengthen social ties in Javanese society. By gathering and sharing in this ritual, the community strengthens their solidarity and sense of community. This is a reflection of the values that are valued in Javanese culture, which is also an integral part of their cultural identity.



Figure 3: The Value of Harmonization of Javanese Society

Source: Personal Documentation

This research highlights that Megengan helps the Javanese people to explore the meaning of their lives. Through the physical and spiritual preparations carried out, the community is invited to reflect on their relationship with God and the meaning of their lives.(Sulaksono & Hasanah, 2022) This is a time for them to strengthen their faith and gain inner peace, all of which are important aspects of finding meaning in

life. The Megengan ritual also plays an important role in the formation of the social identity of the Javanese people. Through various activities carried out in this ritual, the community learns about the importance of togetherness and harmony. This helps shape their social identity as members of a community that values those values.

In the social context, Megengan serves as a means to strengthen social ties and build a harmonious community. By sharing food and prayers, the community shows their solidarity and strengthens the sense of community. This is the foundation for a harmonious and balanced life in Javanese society. Self-control is one of the important values taught through the Megengan ritual. Javanese people are taught to control their passions and emotions, which is part of the preparation for welcoming Ramadan. This self-control becomes the basis for a more disciplined and moral values-oriented life. (Gai & Bhattacharjee, 2022) In this context, Megengan helps the community to achieve a balance between worldly and spiritual needs. By controlling their passions and emotions, they can achieve inner peace and spiritual balance. This shows that rituals can help people to achieve a more harmonious and balanced life.

The Megengan ritual also plays an important role in the spiritual life of the Javanese people. Through the various activities carried out, they are invited to reflect on their relationship with God and strengthen their faith. This is a time for them to seek inner peace and delve into the spiritual meaning of their traditions. In this context, Megengan helps the Javanese people to achieve spiritual balance. Through self-control and spiritual reflection, they can achieve inner peace and balance in their lives. It shows how rituals can serve as a means to achieve a more harmonious and balanced life.

This research also shows the role of Megengan as a means of moral education for the Javanese people. Through the various activities carried out in this ritual, they are taught about the importance of togetherness, harmony, and self-control. This helps shape their moral character and reinforces the values that are valued in Javanese culture. (Saefudin et al., 2020) In this context, Megengan serves as a means to educate the younger generation about important moral values in life. By participating in this ritual, they learn about the importance of

solidarity, self-control, and spiritual balance. This helps them to become better members of their community.

Conclusion

This research reveals that the Megengan ritual has a deep existential, philosophical, and spiritual meaning for the Javanese people. Through Megengan, individuals and communities find meaning in life, strengthen cultural identity, and maintain a balance between temporal and spiritual needs. This research also contributes to the literature on anthropological philosophy by providing an in-depth analysis of cultural rituals that have been underappreciated from a philosophical perspective. The research findings are expected to provide new insights into how cultural traditions can function as a reflection and the formation of identity and meaning of life for the people who carry them out.

Research on Megengan rituals has made a significant contribution to the literature of anthropological philosophy. By providing an in-depth analysis of Megengan, this study enriches academics' understanding of how cultural rituals can function as a reflection and formation of identity and the meaning of life. This research also opens up new perspectives on the role of rituals in the daily lives of the Javanese people and provides new insights into the relationship between rituals, cultural identity, and the meaning of life and education for the millennial generation.

Through this analysis, one can see that Megengan helps the Javanese people to achieve a balance between worldly and spiritual needs. This ritual also serves as a means to strengthen social bonds and build harmonious communities. Thus, Megengan is a concrete example of anthropological theory that can be applied in understanding the dynamics of people's lives and enriching the study of anthropology in general.

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