

## The Sultan's Kapellmeister — Walter Spies, a German Artist in Java —

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### 1. An old capital of the Islamic Mataram dynasty

Yogyakarta, located in south central Java island, is home to the court of the sultan from the Mataram dynasty. This Islamic dynasty, established in 1578, unified Java after the fall of the Hindu Majapahit dynasty, and since then, Islamic influences have taken root in the foundation of traditional Buddhism and Hinduism, creating a unique culture called Java Islam. The Mataram royal family has played a major role in creating and maintaining Java Islamic culture, and the court, called Kraton, has been the place where such cultural forms as dance, music, puppet play, and other rituals were performed and integrated. Even now, under the sultan Hamengku Buwono X, it plays an integral role in protecting and preserving Java Islamic cultural traditions.

Kraton is located in the center of the old city, and high white walls separate the site from the outside world. Within the walls is a large residential area consisting not only of the residence of the sultan, but also of servants' houses and artisans' studios.

As mentioned in the author's *Walter Spies and Weimar Culture*,<sup>1)</sup> Walter Spies, a German artist, found his second home within the walls after arriving from Berlin. From 1924 to 1927, this unique artist served Hamengku Buwono VIII, grandfather of the present sultan, and served as the conductor of the court orchestra, which played Western music.

In a collection of letters written by Spies, *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens (Beauty and Richness of Life)*,<sup>2)</sup> he wrote the most joyful passages, brimming with excitement, during his time in Yogyakarta. After leaving Europe in 1923, Spies came to Java to seek for a place for self-realization. What cultural influences awaited him? This successor to the author's *Walter Spies and Weimar Culture* intends to describe the beginning of the felicitous encounter of East and West by following the tracks of the German artist in Java and confirming his achievements based on further readings of the collection of his letters, *Schöheit und Reichtum des Lebens*.

### 2. Seeking a new home

As described in *Walter Spies and Weimar Culture*, Berlin in the 1920s was an unpleasant place for Spies. The city was, in a sense, experiencing a period full of hope, but on the other hand, the atmosphere was strained by various power struggles, including street fighting, the Kapp Putsch, general strikes and assassinations of political leaders. He was seeking for his "new home" where he could live "among simple people with a different, more spiritual culture (128)."

Spies was already nursing wanderlust during his internment in the Urals. According

to his letter dated 1917, he cherished a plan to visit Samarkand, Tibet and even Latin America.<sup>3)</sup> Finally, however, the destination he chose was the Dutch East Indies.

In 1918, the young artist Spies again returned to Germany from Russia. He promoted friendship with artists of “the November Group”; among its members, he particularly mentioned Max Pechstein, Emil Nolde and George Grosz.<sup>4)</sup> Spies’s mingling with these people also meant his belonging to the German tradition of dreamers of paradise.

Southern paradise mythology was formed in the framework of criticism against the absolutism in the late period of the Enlightenment. The first emigration plan of German intellectuals to Tahiti was already recorded in 1777, or 70 years before France occupied the islands.<sup>5)</sup> Fifty years later, Goethe revealed his dream of being born on unspoiled southern islands in a dialogue with Eckermann.<sup>6)</sup>

In the late 19th century, Germany obtained North-East New Guinea and Palau, and established a museum of ethnology in Dresden. In 1905, the expressionist group “the Bridge” was formed in the city. Pechstein and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, among other members, were greatly impressed by Palauan architecture and ornamentation which were exhibited in the museum.<sup>7)</sup> In 1910, when Spies came to the city for higher education, an exhibition of Gauguin’s paintings was held.<sup>8)</sup> Seven years after his death, the latter half of Gauguin’s life was glamorized and his paintings were soon regarded as a genre per se. In 1913, Pechstein finally made up his mind and went to Palau. People said, “Aha, Gauguin!” to him, sneering at his “copying” the lifestyle of the Westerner in Tahiti.<sup>9)</sup> In the same year, Nolde, another member of “the Bridge”, accompanied a medical survey group from the German government to visit New Guinea, Java and Burma, among other regions. In a letter from New Guinea, he showed his pride and self-esteem as an artist, saying: “I know no one but Gauguin and me, myself, who has brought something lasting from the infinite abundance of primitive natural life.”<sup>9)</sup> After returning to Germany, Nolde and Pechstein met again in Berlin and participated in a series of events in 1918, such as the establishments of “the Workers Council for Art” and “the November Group”.

Spies, having encountered a Henri Rousseau in Moscow and regarded the encounter as a “revelation”, must have been excited by the experience of the above two people, and it can be assumed that his specific longing for the South Seas was formed in his mind at that time. Then, one day, he encountered a book: a photo album entitled *Bali: people, land, dancing, festivals, temples*.<sup>10)</sup> The photography was taken by Gregor Krause, a German doctor who worked in the Dutch East Indies. According to Irene Erdmann’s memoir, Spies came to her carrying the album in his arm, ecstatic with excitement. She says in the memoir: “‘I’ll go there,’ said Walja ... he said that in a very different way from how people usually used to say it while looking at photo albums of beautiful landscapes. The pictures, the overwhelmed friend and his words, uttered not only outwards to us, but also inwards to himself, in a way, were unforgettable for us and remained in our memory as something decisive and significant. (262)”

Inheriting the tradition from such pioneers as Gauguin, Nolde, Pechstein, and Krause,

Spies developed a dream of a new home. As mentioned in the author's *Walter Spies and Weimar Culture*, a real turning point in Spies's life was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Schoonderbeek, whose relatives were living in Bandung in central Java. With a letter of introduction to them, Spies landed at Batavia in Java in October 1923. In this way, he actually visited the South Sea islands, a projection of many Europeans' dreams regarding lost paradise. Furthermore, he probably realized a more felicitous "regeneration" than any other visitor to the islands before him.

#### 4. Toward the essence of Javanese culture

The first place Spies visited in Java was Bandung. He was immediately overwhelmed by tropical nature. He gazed in wonder at the natural lushness, volcanic features and abundant plant species. However, he enjoyed seeing the Javanese more than the above characteristics. "These people, the Sundanese<sup>11</sup>) and Javanese, are so incredibly beautiful, so slightly built, brown and aristocratic, that all who are not these kinds should be ashamed of themselves. (149)" Spies was first visually fascinated by Javanese landscape and the Javanese people. Thanks to his musical talent, he immediately settled in the Western community and made a living as a pianist at a movie theater. Based on the prospect of economic independence, he even sent money to his family in Germany. And it was Javanese music that amazed his ears as a musician: "The music here! For God's sake, that is something marvelous! Played on instruments never seen, melodies never heard. (149)" During Spies's stay in Java, gamelan music remained the biggest fascination for him.

He was excited in the new environment, and he felt as if he had received an unexpected wonderful gift. In the first letter to his family, he wrote, "Oh, I could go crazy at the thought of how marvelous it is here and how terrible it is that you are all there in Germany, suffocating in the mud and dreadfulness. (149)"

Although Spies made a good start in Bandung, he soon moved to Yogyakarta to live at the center of Javanese culture. He immediately was accepted by the Dutch community, obtained jobs as a casino pianist, a home music tutor and a conductor for a choral group. Yogyakarta excited Spies even more than Bandung. It seems that his writing style reached its heights in Yogyakarta. His exaggerated, euphoric style reflected the magnitude of his daily amazement. There are several examples. "There are shops whose settings are ten times as big and grandiose as the biggest and the most elegant ones in Europe! There are a couple of streets with Chinese, Japanese and Indian shops. ... Then, the market every day. Colorful masses of good- and bad-smelling things, fruits, people, animals and birds, very amusing and exciting; (150)" "Such beautiful people there are here that you can't take your eyes off them! And such good figures they have that there could not be better-build people. (151)" Besides, Spies joyfully produced detailed reports on beautiful rice terraces which were always filled with water due to excellent irrigation systems, sarongs worn by Javanese and their beautiful batik patterns, or the many birdcages hanging from eaves and the songs of the colorful birds. He was most fascinated by Javanese art and paid it an enthusiastic

compliment. “I can’t understand at all how such a god-like thing exists, and the music! All the art in Europe is in comparison such muck and dung that they should be ashamed!! ... Now that I have come into contact with the Javanese and their phenomenally high and fantastic culture, I’m almost crazy! One can hardly imagine such a beautiful thing! I worship them, like nothing ever in my life! (151)” Furthermore, Spies got to know of the existence of a large gamelan ensemble at the sultan’s court. He also heard about the world inside the white walls, where “the sultan resides with his forty wives and one hundred fifty-eight children,<sup>12)</sup> with elephants, huge coaches, monkeys and more than ten thousand servants. (150)” And classical operas which are sometimes presented in the court were “said to be more fabulous than anything in this world (150).” Spies was impatient for an opportunity to see the opera. One day, an opportunity to visit the court finally arose. A ball was held for the President of the Philippines, who was paying a courtesy call on the sultan, and the casino orchestra, of which Spies was a member, was asked to conduct accompaniment. Furthermore, the above-mentioned classical opera was also planned to be held. He was excited and worried that he might “die then and there, or begin to howl like a child! (155)” In fact, he was even more fortunate in the court than he had expected.

##### 5. An audience with the sultan

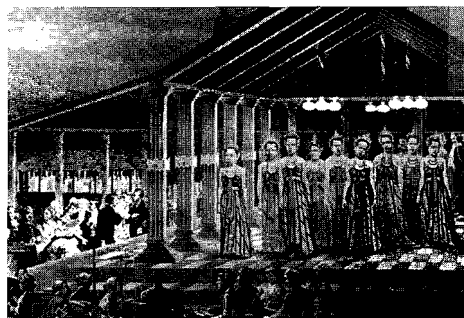
Spies memorized in detail this evening in the court and reported it in his letters, which provide an interesting record by an European who observed Javanese Islamic court culture in the 1920s.

The banquet hosted by the sultan began when guests arrived at the court garden, which seemed to Spies as though “a fairyland”. They were welcomed by princes “beautiful like gods”, who were “gentle and slim, in unimaginable costume.” Spies was also impressed by all the court servants, who wore “incredible old Javanese costume and daggers of gold and silver” at their waists. The sultan was waiting for the guests in the main court hall, sitting on a gold throne and flanked by his wives who were “peaceful and quiet, as though made from the finest wax (165)”. Between them, Europeans in full Western dress seated themselves.

Then the music began. The court gamelans played the overture of the opera. With



The main hall in Kraton



Dancers at a banquet in Kraton,  
around 1870

a keen sense of art, Spies left a unique description of Javanese music and dancing, which is, as mentioned later, a particularly precious ethnomusicological record.

“The old imperial gamelan started to play, at first gently, like drops of water, deep rumbling strokes of the gong, so deep that it caused anxiety. First, a beautiful, flexible female voice started the song, then others joined in. Then a male chorus answered, and they were all accompanied by a large wild forest of marvelous, crystal clear metallic sounds and wooden tones, which served as the “flower.” Gently whining violins and a high, needle-fine coloratura of fine reed flutes in between. It was like all of these took turns; the one became lower, the other wilder and louder, and the excited drums in between and behind them. Sometimes all the music faded into nothing and then came back again, dropping in from somewhere, ... (165f.)”

Then, dancers appeared. The four “most beautiful girls” were princesses of the sultan, “in marvelous, simple costume, totally stylized from head to toe.” They were as though “four Egyptian queens stepping out of a relief, ... with no expressions on their faces, just stylized. They came slowly slinking, with ghostly incredible steps, closer and closer, ... toward the sultan. (166)” Spies felt like he “was not in the real world at all”, as “we know things like this only from theaters or movies or ballet”, but “no matter how completely good it may be, doesn't come close to this genuine thing here! (166)”

When the dancers reached the stage, the opera began slowly. “The gamelan has somehow changed in rhythm and melody, and they start their unreal dance. Such a thing is beyond the imagination: the movements are hardly perceptible, you have no idea how they do it. The stylized hands and arms move slowly into positions never seen before. The girls seem to float in mid-air and — wonderfully — their costumes seem to dance with them. When a dancer turns, the train or any end of the dress lies in folds, then it lies down with the four trains exactly the same, as if they were dancing exactly the same, ... Sometimes they stand still for minutes, or float around and through each other, up and down, and then they take swords and shields and fight, slinking into incredible positions, and all of this happens as though depicted on an ancient Egyptian relief! (167)”

While watching the opera performed in the court, which is the most prestigious of Javanese performing arts, Spies “was totally insane with happiness. (166)” After the opera ended, the banquet changed to a Western ball. The sultan recognized that the musician who played the fox trot on the piano was a new member of the casino's band. Being interested in the new pianist, the sultan invited him to his side to ask about his personal background. Spies had an unexpected opportunity to converse with the sultan. Spies described his impression of the sultan as “a tremendously kind, clever and educated man; the aristocracy of a genuine Javanese radiates from each fingertip. (167f.)”

Furthermore, another unexpected thing occurred the following day. Spies said: “The next morning, it did happen! I could not trust my eyes; there came coaches in front of my apartment, in which princes with an entourage of a dozen servants, with all the ceremonial trappings, golden umbrellas opened, golden utensils carried high on golden platters, and the

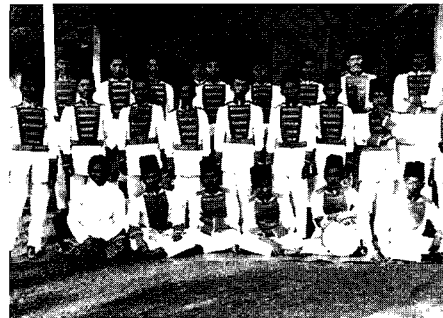


The sultan,  
Hamengku Buwono VIII



A coach of the sultan,  
1989

princes wanted to talk to me on behalf of the sultan. And what was it about? The sultan bid them ask me if I was willing to take on the job, to conduct his court ballroom dance orchestra!!!! They are all Javanese, thirty or forty men, the strings and the wind section, and they are trying to make European music, but it doesn't work out without instruction or conducting, and they don't even have a pianist! And so I am expected to repair all of that and somehow try to make it better! For God's sake, is there something more wonderful than working together with these likable people who almost all have absolute pitch and feel everything keenly! Imagine, being around every day at Kraton among these demigods. How should I behave myself there? ... But I think that's going almost too far! (168)"



Walter Spies's orchestra,  
Yogyakarta, 1924

Needless to say, Spies accepted this honor and served as the "Kapellmeister", the conductor of the court orchestra under the sultan's direct orders. The main assignment of the orchestra was the performance of the national anthem of the Netherlands at ceremonies, however, as the orchestra had no leaders, it had not been able to satisfactorily fulfill its duty. Spies, the first European to live inside Kraton, devoted himself to the fulfillment of his duty. Then, the orchestra improved such that it could play Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and sometimes even transformed itself into a jazz band at a ball to act as a substitute for the casino's band. "The sultan was happy and glad as a child, (180)" at the improvement of his own orchestra. Spies spent the four years until 1927 serving as the "Kapellmeister", after which he emigrated to Bali.

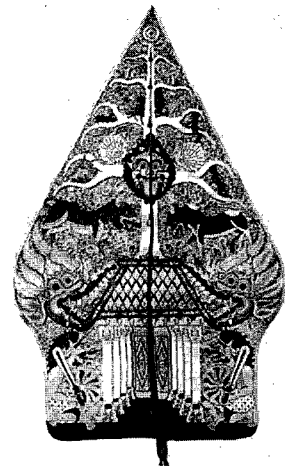
## 6. The first European interested in Javanese arts

The life in Kraton allowed Spies to have a relatively large amount of free time. While spending time on painting, his main profession, Spies studied Malayan and Javanese and came to learn much about such arts as dancing and puppetry. He commented on these performing arts with great intensiveness in letters to his family members. Some of his comments on Wayang Kulit and dancing are quoted:

“And the Wayang Kulit, this music drama of shadow marionettes! Oh God, it's a delightfully perfect thing! ... the figures ... I've never believed before that they could possess such a great ability in expression, ...— it's all about wars and battles that were fought by princes against giants or animals or gods ... — And the forest is represented by only one thing, which is a big filigree work representing a muddle of trees, birds, figures, ornaments<sup>19</sup>; this thing can be taken to represent everything: a mountain, water, fire, forest, thunder. And at the moment this comes behind the white screen and is held and moved in various ways according to the roll, one can imagine nothing else than the thing it is supposed to represent. ... We had utterly a picture of a deep, boundless forest: ... But it is exactly the same as watching a play at the Stanislavsky Theater one hundred times with the same enthusiasm, only that this one here is somehow much more simple and perfect: it is so natural, like a sunset or a blooming flower!! (171f.)”

“Javanese dance is so far ahead and in the future, the noblest thing that has ever existed. ... For me, it was great experience like nothing else in the world, it is like a new world-view! The composition of such dance, particularly that of the strong male dance, is incredible, — the contrasts and the intensity! On the other hand, the delicate female dance is like the inner dreams of a flower. ... These dances are most lyrical and, like the moonlight, the most filigreed things you can imagine. Even each fingertip radiates spiritualness. ... And the way such fighting is stylized and incorporated in the dance is beyond description. (173f.)”

In his comments, he emphasized the wonderful integration of dance, music and singing. “The most wonderful thing is the way this kind of dance is accompanied by music; it is very different from what is ‘in’ in Europe. Sometimes the music becomes shrill and loud, so loud that the sounds coming from the many gongs boom all at once and echo, and the dancers stand still as though cast out of metal, ... And sometimes, in the middle of a furious battle, there is barely audible music, whispering and threatening. Other times it is an exciting rattle and clatter in crazy rhythm, ... Then, ... suddenly the male chorus begins to howl like a siren and roar, everything precisely in rhythm!! ... I can't watch things like this and not be moved. The first time, I cried my eyes out with ecstasy, enthusiasm or emotion, whatever you might call it. Something similar only happened to me once, during a passage in the Matthew's



Gunungan

Passion.<sup>14)</sup> (174f.)”

Spies, a young artist who had experienced all kinds of art such as opera, ballet, theater and film in Europe, asked of his family, “how can one live in Europe, anyway? (155)” He declared that he “would soon go naked from the waist up, wear a Javanese headscarf, and walk barefoot (168).” To learn Javanese dancing and how to play “all the gamelan instruments (168),” he began training based on instruction from his artistic associates in Kraton.

Spies not only learned gamelan playing, but also devised Western musical notation for Javanese tunes, and completed scores of 26 Javanese musical tunes (6-8 pages each) which he studied. What is worthy of special mention is that he devised polyrhythmic musical notation for Kendang,<sup>15)</sup> which, according to his observation, had 23 tone colors. When Spies understood the rules of gamelan music, including counterpoint and harmony, he was very delighted and even called himself “the happiest man on earth (216).” The theoretical study of Javanese music by Spies contributed to subsequent ethnomusicological development. This is one of his achievements in Java, equal to guiding the orchestra. To promote the excellence of Javanese music, he wanted to introduce it to Europe. He set himself a task of writing a musicological study on Javanese and Balinese music, and to begin with, he planned to publish the abovementioned scores with simple commentary in Europe. The person who helped the plan was Jaap Kunst, a Dutch official of the East Indies government, who became later the President of the Executive Board of the International Folk Music Council and the Honorary President of the Society for Ethnomusicology. He was surprised to learn that Spies’s scores faithfully reproduced the performance of gamelan music, and thought that Western music “can learn a lot” from this “grandiose music. (241).”<sup>16)</sup> The scores, in which several organizations, including the music academies in Berlin and Vienna, showed interest, were going to be published by the Royal Batavia Association for Art and Science. Spies also looked forward to seeing that “European musicians and composers would marvel at what fantastic things there are in the world that they have no idea of. (219)” The scores were, however, not published after all, partly because Spies found them dissatisfactory due to his lack of insight into singing. At that time, he seemed to come to doubt Western characteristics of collecting and conveying knowledge. It is believed that his doubts discouraged him from writing. Spies justified himself to Kunst, who continued to persuade him to publish the scores, as follows: “I see again and again that people set up hundreds of false hypotheses too quickly and then, drawing logical conclusions from them, come to totally wrong assumptions. And what is the sense in publishing undemonstrable pseudo-truths that have sprung only from a



The scores made by Walter Spies



European mind and, as it always seems to me, never come any closer to the point! (310).” He subsequently continued his resistance to European adherence to self-structured logic. Even after moving to Bali, Spies always took down musical notation and took notes, and people around him wondered with a sigh “when he would let something appear in print. (235)” Hickman Powell, an American journalist, wrote: “One day, and it will not be many years from now, all that will be left of Bali will be in Spies’s records. Otherwise, the best will be gone.”<sup>17)</sup> However, Spies left the writing to others and continued to refuse requests to publish his books.<sup>18)</sup> Despite his 20 years of activities in the Dutch East Indies, he left no writings, except several newspaper articles and letters. This is why great importance is placed on descriptions in letters.<sup>19)</sup>

Has “the best” which Spies did not record, “been gone”? As mentioned, Spies hated inflexibility of European thinking. It can be interpreted that, in essence, Spies attempted to prevent the integration of Javanese culture into the framework of Western logic-based thinking—or at least refused involvement in such a phenomenon. Such an attitude offered important suggestions regarding possible unintended violation in connection with intercultural relations. At the same time, his flexible attitude of being involved in revitalization of Balinese culture, called the “Bali Renaissance,” clearly differed from a belief in “authentic origin”. It can be said that his consistent principles were confidence in the vitality of Javanese and Balinese cultures with their own values and the distance he maintained from Orientalism.

Of course, not all of Spies’s rich knowledge has been lost. Study results of gamelan music were inherited by Kunst and his assistant Ijzerdraat and influenced theoretical study of gamelan music. According to Ijzerdraat, many Westerners thought that Oriental music was only the sensuous expression of tone colors devoid of rules. Spies, however, revealed harmony, counterpoint and melodics and maintained that there were similarities between Western and gamelan music. Since then, some people have even claimed that only these two types of music have symphonic aspects.<sup>20)</sup> Furthermore, Spies had not a little influence on Javanese musicians in Yogyakarta. For example, he introduced western style of musicography to the Javanese, gave piano lessons as a tool for that purpose<sup>21)</sup> and devised and introduced a method of describing hammer movement for gamelan for local music school lessons.<sup>22)</sup> Above all, Spies was warmly received by local artists as the first European interested in Javanese performing arts and who worked on them with an objective academic interest. They remembered him as a rare white who brought change to their self-consciousness.<sup>23)</sup> It was not for another 40 years that ethnomusicology would flourish.

## 7. “Yogyakarta, ich muß dich lassen.”

Walter Spies was wonderfully free from equating the South with primitiveness. Before making a voyage to Palau, Max Pechstein already thought within the framework of strong adoration of nudity culture.<sup>24)</sup> Emil Nolde did not notice the existence of advanced cultures which differed from European cultures until he visited Java. His recognition,

however, rather resulted in enhancing his self-consciousness as a northern person.<sup>25)</sup> Meanwhile, Spies had a talent for understanding the characteristics of a different culture in the context of that culture itself. For example, Westerners tended to consider Javanese weak-willed and idle. However, Spies said: “It is a tremendously cultivated sense of tact, this ‘believe oneself lowly’ and ‘entrust everything to others’ attitude. The people are full of consideration and politeness. (155)” “Never have I felt such wonderful laziness before, nothing urges you to act and nobody insists on anything. All things are satisfying, and people adapt themselves to various situations. And that is the most precious thing, to lose your sense of yourself. You learn this from the Javanese, because that is their essence. (176)” “In Europe, people struggle through twenty different thoughts a day and yet they are not content; but here one single thought is worked on a whole day long, and even this goes too fast for the people here. And then it flickers, it blazes fiercely, ... creating thousands of explosions, ... (177)”

Spies did not understand different cultures in terms of superiority. Such an attitude made it difficult for him to coexist with the local European community. He was particularly worried about the European colonialist attitude. Harsh criticism of Europeans is found in his letter, in contrast to admiration of Javanese. “The stupid damned Europeans think themselves gods. ... I have little contact with Europeans here, as they are only interested in politics and money, ... (179)” Spies might have left Bandung so early due to friction with the European community. He wrote a letter immediately before leaving Bandung. “The Dutch here are the most disagreeable and provincial people that you can think of — uneducated, loutish, stupid, narrow-minded, conceited, and I can find no words to express my hatred for them. It seems to me, I will come into even greater conflicts with them! It is enough to drive you mad, and how they behave toward the natives is a disgrace! (149)”

The situation slightly improved in Yogyakarta. As usual, Spies hated European oppression. But he was living in the world protected by the sultan, and he had contact with Javanese. He noticed that it made the Javanese very happy to know that “there is an



Sawahs im Preangergebirge  
(Rice Terraces in Preanger  
Mountains), 1923



Die Krabbenfischer  
(The Crab Fishermen), 1924

European who, very differently from any other Europeans, should be interested in them and their art. Then they behaved very openly and frankly (171)" to him. However, as he was not well paid in Kraton, he had to obtain additional income as a piano instructor and accompanist for concerts. It was inevitable to work in the European community. At that time, many excellent musicians from Europe visited Java,<sup>26)</sup> and Spies earned a good reputation as an accompanist.<sup>27)</sup> He did not, however, get along with soloists. He called a party of soloists "awful cabaret people. (194)"

Europeans' ill feelings towards Spies gradually increased, as well. "The quieter and more distant I become, the more people get angry. Many nasty things are said, even nastier things are suspected, ... I'm little concerned with all of this, yet the fact itself is often paralyzing. (229)" Furthermore, he was dissatisfied with his painting. In a letter to Franz Roh, an art historian in Munich, he wrote: "Something about the intensity of the concept in my paintings gets lost, ... But it seems to me that neither Java as a country nor the Javanese people are not to blame for my 'paralysis'. It's been nothing but the whole unconscious and yet very paralyzing humbling of myself before the feeble, shallow, uncultivated Europeans here. It is indeed a mire of human beings, hopeless and inescapable! The strongest and the best ideas are here pitilessly trampled down under the rude and uncouth feet of snobs. (222)" The attractiveness of Javanese culture no longer compensated for Spies's disappointment.

In 1925, Spies first visited Bali at the invitation of Chokorda Gede Raka Sukawati, a member of the Bali royalty, who met Spies in Kraton. He was fascinated by Balinese culture, which he found "in every respect inexhaustible. (208)" He decided to move there "in order to be all alone with the wonderful people there (219)" and "to find peace at last, and to begin to paint at last! (226)" A letter of his at that time says, "I'll go to Bali entirely. I am scared of the Europeans here; this slag of humanity can only befoul things. But please, ... don't think that this country and the people could have a negative influence on me. The passivity and seeming listlessness of the Javanese is nothing but very strong concentration and detachment! With the Balinese, there is still something demonic and full of the reality of life ... God, Devil, the world and I, everything is one!! (223)" The vitality of Balinese culture was a new attraction which could not be found in the Javanese court.

In summer 1927, Spies retired his position as the conductor of the court orchestra and left Yogyakarta for Bali, where he finally obtained "a new home inhabited by simple people." Focusing on Spies's life in Bali exceeds the scope of this paper. Fortunately, however, other literature covers his activities on another island of the Dutch East Indies.<sup>28)</sup>

### 8. Earnest playing in life

Spies's achievements in Java and Bali can be described variously. For example, these terms include the Diaspora story of a German artist in the Weimar period and the story of a cultural ripple effect through which perspective was introduced to Balinese painting. Spies did not, however, become a lonely white, as did Gauguin. Walter Spies can be separated from preceding visitors to southern islands in that he always enjoyed local cultural activities

by living together with local people. When the sultan offered Spies the position of the conductor of the court orchestra, he said to himself: "To whom else does such a thing happen!!! Why is it that these things occur one after the other? Wherever I go, everything comes to me in even greater volume and more marvelously than I had dreamed. (168)" Spies's activities can probably be characterized as the embodiment of changes in the relationship between Europeans and other cultures, i.e., the transition from colonialism to tourism. The characteristics do not only reflect the chronological position of tourism. Nelson Graburn, an anthropologist, discussed tourism as a "sacred journey",<sup>29)</sup> a modern ritual, which was experienced by Spies in the most pioneering and thorough manner. Graburn regarded the hours spent in tourism as a ritual to stop normal-profane time and create abnormal-sacred state. Following his idea, Spies, who escaped from everyday activities and alienation in Europe and saw his individuality developing in the East, can be regarded as a person who discovered unending sacred time in the course of a sacred journey and lived a ritual life to the end.

In 1940, Spies was interned by the Dutch government as an enemy alien. In the previous year, he wrote a long letter to his younger brother as if professing his faith: "There are so many wonderful things that I can hardly find time to take a look at them or play with them. So many things remain unplayed with!! ... What can I do for the fact that the seriousness of life dislikes me!? Life does not take me seriously! But I love life, and I am seeking seriousness. And I find it, and find it even through play and while playing! It seems to me, furthermore, I find it greater and more truly than someone who is angry through all the day and looks in deadly seriousness for the meaning and value and profundity of life ... As I believe in life and am living in the belief — and am playing in life and believing in the play. I believe in the seriousness of play. ... And this belief is so strong and it covers, absorbs, all the suffering, all the selfishness, all the temporal, spatial and physical circumstances, so that only the glorious holiness of life shines through. This is living life, loving life, playing life and being in the middle of life! (392f.)" In other words, Spies became well aware of the dualism of "work" and "play" mentioned as the tourist lifestyle by Shinji Yamashita.<sup>30)</sup> Spies believed in the sacredness of play and enjoyed happiness arising from this faith. When life itself can be regarded as a journey, it could be possible to live the whole life as a ritual. Loyalty to the ritual in a whole life might serve as a bond between Spies and the Javanese- Balinese people.

Spies called his life "a never-ending birthday (392)" filled with gifts. Such a lifestyle was exactly like the art of living an unending time of ritual. And the collection of his letters, *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens (Beauty and Richness of Life)*, fully represents the festival brightness of a sacred ritual. The name of Walter Spies, a pioneer of the "sacred journey," will probably gain more importance in our time, where a statistic says that in the year 2000 more than 750 million people will be traveling around the world,<sup>31)</sup> in the search for richness of life.

## Notes

- 1) Soejima, Miyuki. *Walter Spies and Weimar Culture*, in: *Language Studies*, No. 5. Otaru University of Commerce, 1997, p. 59-71.
- 2) Rhodius, Hans. ed., *Schönheit und Reichtum de Lebens: WATER SPIES*, Den Haag, 1964. Pages quoted from the collection of letters are shown in parentheses.
- 3) Spies, Letter to Mother, 1917, Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 75.
- 4) Spies, Letter to Kasper Niehaus, 1939, Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 33.
- 5) Dieterich, Gerd. *Aufbruch zu den glückseligen Inseln. Anmerkungen zur »Palau-Sehnsucht«*, in: *MAX PECHSTEIN: DAS FERNE PARADIES*, Städtisches Kunstmuseum Spendhaus Reutlingen (ed.), Hatje Verlag, 1995, p. 49.
- 6) Eckermann, Johann Peter. *Dialog with Goethe*, 12.3.1828, in the third part.
- 7) Pechstein, Max. *Erinnerungen*, ed. by Leopold Reidemeyer, Stuttgart 1993, p. 22; Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig. *Die Arbeit E.L. Kirchers*, in: Kornfeld, E.W.: *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Nachzeichnung seines Lebens*, Bern, 1979, p. 333.
- 8) Lewey, Petra. *Mensch und Natur im Werk von Max Pechstein*, in: *MAX PECHSTEIN: DAS FERNE PARADIES*, p. 103.
- 9) Nolde, Emil. *Welt und Heimat*, Köln, 1990, p. 89.
- 10) Krause, Gregor. *Bali: Volk, Land, Tänze, Fest, Tempel*, Folkwang Verlag, reissued 1926, by Georg Müller, München.
- 11) Ethnic people living in the Western area of Java island.
- 12) Exaggerated numbers. In fact, Hamengku Buwono VIII had 8 wives and 34 children and Hamengku Buwono VII had 20 wives and 78 children. The number of family members was believed to be the combined numbers of the above. (Album Agung Jumenegan Dalem Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, Persembahan Panerbit Kedauantanan Rakyat Yogyakarta, 1989 Cetakan ke 2)
- 13) Gunungan (See illustration), a main piece in Wayang Kulit.
- 14) Concert conducted by Johan Schoonderbeek in the Netherlands.
- 15) Cylindrical drum, playing a leading role in the gamelan ensemble.
- 16) Kunst, Jaap, letter to Von Hornbostel, head of Phonogramm-Archives of Academy of Arts in Berlin, 8. 5.1926, Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 240.
- 17) Powell, Hickman, *The Last Paradise: An American's 'discovery' of Bali in the 1920's*, Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 229.
- 18) Reminiscence of Maria Sitsen-Russer, Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 158.
- 19) Reminiscence of Bernard Ijzeraat, Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 233.
- 20) *ibid.*, p. 233.
- 21) *ibid.*, p. 234.
- 22) Article carried in *De Locomotief*, a daily in Java, *ibid.*, p. 236f.
- 23) Reminiscence of Bernard Ijzeraat, Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 234.
- 24) Grubert Thurow, Beate. *Das ferne Paradies: Pechstein und Palau*, in *MAX PECHSTEIN: DAS FERNE PARADIES*, p. 72.
- 25) Nolde, *ibid.*, p. 115f.
- 26) "for great, so-called artists often come here, and we can listen better music here in general than in Berlin or anywhere else. (190)"
- 27) Rhodius, *ibid.*, p. 198ff.
- 28) Rhodius, Hans and Darling, John. *Walter Spies and Balinese Art*, Amsterdam, 1980; Spruit, Rund, *Artists on Bali*, Amsterdam 1995; Vickers, Adrian. *Bali, a paradise created*, Berkeley-Singapore, 1989.

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- 29) Graburn, Nelson. *Tourism: The Sacred Journey*, in: Valense Smith (ed.), *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, Philadelphia, 1977.
- 30) 山下晋司 「序 南へ！北へ！—移動の民族誌—」 in: 『岩波講座文化人類学 第7巻：移動の民族誌』岩波書店, (Yamashita, Shinji. *Introduction, to South and North — Ethnography of Migration*, in: *Iwanami Course Cultural Anthropology Vol. VII — Ethnography of Migration*, Iwanami Shoten), 1996, p. 8.
- 31) *ibid.*, p. 6.

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