



## Balinese Culture and Art Traditions: Assets of Cultural Tourism

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**T**ourism has become a very important national economic activity of Indonesia. It has been contributing considerably to the national income through various products and services. Tourism is a special national priority, and its development program is carried out along with others based on the so-called "Trilogi Pembangunan" (the three aspects of development program), namely, growth, balance distribution, and stability of development.

In implementing the development program in the tourism sector, the government of Indonesia have decided their main policies in managing tourism through the National Rule, No. 9/1990. Entering the second 25-year national development program (1993-2018), which is initiated by the sixth five-year development program (PELITA VI), the government have been paying an even greater attention to this sector as it is hoped to be a major source of the country's income, apart from the oil sectors.

### **Art and Cultural Tourism in Bali**

Bali is one of the main tourist destinations in South East Asia, and has, year after year, been increasing the quality as well as quantity of its tourism facilities. The island, which is made up of an area of 5,632 square kilometres, with a 2.8 million population, comprises of 96,703.55 hectare of wet agricultural area, 202,838.21 hectare of dry, uncultivated land, 125,534.11 hectare of forests, 99,151.21 hectare of dry-crop areas, and 40,049.41 hectare allocated for housing and tourism facilities. Among the space allocation, the present tourism facilities occupy only some 0.1 percent of the total. This fact shows that land use for tourism facilities is still far below the maximum use. And, Bali still has a great potential for further tourism development.

The largest sector in Bali's economy is tourism, and its importance has increased due to the current decline in Indonesia's export earnings from oil and gas. One rule of technology in

supporting tourism is to improve the infrastructure for transport, accommodation, and communication. This is demonstrated by the efficient travel agencies, hotel of all classes, and facilities for domestic and international communication that visitors find in Bali.

The many aspects of Balinese culture are much more important attractions for guests than recreation or shopping facilities; it is Balinese culture that has made Bali so famous around the world.

We are quite aware of the ambivalent nature of tourism and its impact on art, culture and society. Like other tourist destinations, we must present the best and authentic aspects of Bali for visitors to appreciate, but also, at the same time, prevent any desacralisation or commercialisation of our culture.

From a historical perspective, it is clear that Balinese culture in its essence has always been, and still remains, an open culture such as those in Java and Lombok.

History also reveals that Bali has been opened to influences from several foreign cultures from China, India, the Middle East, and Europe. Some observations can be made from the history of these interactions with different cultures:

1. Balinese culture is flexible and adaptable;
2. it is also able to receive and transform foreign influences, enriching itself while at the same time maintaining its own cultural identity. For example, in the decorative arts, we adopt patterns of Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Dutch motifs (wolanda = patra);
3. Balinese culture is able to preserve its identity with further development.

A special pattern of relationships that has great significance in the present and future development of Balinese culture can be seen in the integration of tradition, religion, and culture with society. This was developed around the beginning of the Christian era.

The deep structure of this integration of religion and tradition in Balinese culture, with high intrinsic values in religions, aesthetics, and solidarity, was preserved and strengthened within the framework provided by the stable and organized social systems.

As traditional institutions, these social systems are presented by the two basic categories of economic-religious life in Balinese society: the "dry" and "wet" traditions. Social institutions in the "dry" traditions

include the desa adat and banjar (territorial units), dadia (kinship group), and several types of sekaa (voluntary associations). In the social system of the "wet tradition", there are institutions such as the subak (association of farmers whose rice fields are irrigated by the same upstream water source) and the sekaa seni (voluntary art association). These institutions form a network of "ties that bind", providing social, cultural, and emotional links that unite the Balinese people.

All of the institutions that are important in preserving Balinese culture are predicated upon the fundamental concept of Tri Hita Karana (the Three Causes of Benevolent Life): God (parhyangan), mankind (pawongan), and environment (palemahan). This concept embodies a philosophy of harmony - in the relationships between man and God, man and man, and man and the natural world. Such a pattern of harmony is essentially the Balinese's goal in life, in accordance

with the precepts of the Hindu religion, as expressed in the sacred Veda texts, Moksartham Jagadithiya Ca iti Dharma (The aim of religion is to achieve physical well-being and spiritual happiness in a harmonious and balanced manner).

Two other basic tenets also support and preserve Balinese culture: the concept of dualism (rwa bhineda), and a flexibility best expressed by the adage of "place, time, and context" (desa, kala, patra). The former teaches us that life has both good and bad aspects, which are indivisible and cannot be separated. The latter recognizes that the spatial, temporal, and contextual constraints play an important role in the dynamics of variation within culture and society.

With the perspective provided from the experience of a long history, the support of a stable and mature social system, and a philosophical foundation that is dynamic and flexible, man and society in Bali therefore possess the resources and potential for



*Photo by Ean Lee*

positive response to outside influences, both at the structural as well as the cultural level.

Bali has felt many influences over the centuries, situated as it is, along the main sea route between South and East Asia near the

Spice Island where early Proto-Malay and Deutero-Malay migrations, and major shifts in religions and philosophy occurred: Hinduism and Buddhism from India, Chinese and Islamic traders, European merchantships and later the Dutch colonial government, Christianity, and the Japanese occupation.

Our culture has proved to be



Photo by Ean Lee

highly flexible and resilient; we are able to adapt, transform, and incorporate elements which we deem to be of value. In the final analysis, it may be this selective assimilation that contributes to our success:

Let us take an example from the performing arts. There are three categories of Balinese dance:

1. WALT - sacred, religious, and performed in a temple or any other premise where a ceremony is being held, and which is an integral part of the rest of the ceremonial proceedings. The dances are devotional in nature,

considered as offerings to the deities, and generally devoid of narrative elements.

2. BEBALI - ceremonial dances, also performed in a temple or elsewhere, but which are only accompaniment to the ceremony. The dances include narrative elements.

3. B A L I H - BALIHAN -

secular dances, performed as entertainment, separate from any ceremonial context, and which do not belong to the WALT or B E B A L I categories.

Generally, the context of the performance will determine to which category a

genre will belong. With such a conceptual framework the Balinese can distinguish among performances for different places, times, and conditions.

In addition, old sacred forms can become sources of inspiration for new secular ones. A famous example is Kecak, the "Monkey Dance" chorus of men chanting rhythmic patterns much like a vocal gamelan orchestra. In its original sacred context, Kecak, served as accompaniment for the Sanghyang Dedari trance dance, which was performed during periods of trouble or illness in the village, in which young girls are put into trance and entered

by the deities and dance on men's shoulders without any previous dance training. As an early response to the needs of tourism in the late 1920's, the Kecak was taken out its original context and used to accompany a simple dance drama depicting the story of king Rama's rescue of his wife Sita from demon King Rahwana with the help of the monkey army. Likewise, the Pendet devotional dance, performed by members of the temple congregation before the shrines, has been used as a basis for a contemporary welcome dance often performed now for guests and visitors.

In music, an ancient and rare gamelan orchestra from the palace is now serving as inspiration for the latest "chromatic" creations by modern composers for music to accompany the Sendratari dance drama. New stories and music are performed to standing-room-only crowds of thousands for several nights in a row. The staging is complete with modern lighting, sound-system, made-up and traditional and contemporary costumes.

#### **Preservation and Revitalization on Art Tradition**

Creativity in Art, for Balinese people, is considered to be a way of life, and it is even believed to be one of the regional cultural potencies and pride. Beside helping promote Bali to the world, it is also assumed to be a means of strengthening their social integrity. The present existence of Balinese cultural art is, to some extent, the result of the cultural-oriented development program of Bali.

Realising the vitality and creativity of the Balinese people, the Indonesian government have taken steps on the conservation and revitalization of Balinese cultural art, both for preserving their traditional art, and for meeting the needs of its tourism.

The local government of Bali has been organizing the annual "Bali Art Festivals" since 1979 to preserve the local cultural art traditions, and stimulate the creativity of local artists. The festivals regularly involve a number of activities such as:

1. Cultural procession that opens the festival, presenting various forms of art which exist on the island;
2. Cultural art exhibitions showing various forms of visual arts and handicrafts;
3. Presentation of performing arts (dances, musics, theaters, and dramas);
4. Art competitions which include those of music, dance, traditional culinaries, traditional fashion shows, local songs, etc.;
5. Seminars and discussions on local arts and literature.

One important thing to note is that the "Bali Art Festival" is not held solely for the sake of tourism, but it is also a cultural event with the mission of exploring, developing, and preserving Balinese cultural art. The creativity and innovations expressed during the festivals exert a great impact on the development of the tourism industry.

### **The Impact of Cultural Tourism**

Tourism, no matter where it is, will bring an avoidable interaction between the visiting tourist and the local people, which will consequently cause certain impact on the local people. It is very wise, therefore, if both tourists and locals can exercise their tolerance to reduce or minimize its negative impact.

On the other hand, tourism has brought in a considerably positive impact on Balinese people and culture, as well. We can see it from the increase in incomes which contribute to a higher standard of life. For some three decades, there has been a pessimism within the society toward the extinction of Balinese traditional culture. However, during the course of time, it has been proved that Balinese culture, art and traditions evolved to become even more vivid, and mutually support one another in the tourism industry.

One of the ways of reducing the negative impact of tourism on Bali is the 1971 local governmental policy of developing "cultural tourism". This policy involved the selection of cultural art products to be released for tourist consumption in order to keep reflecting identity of Balinese culture.

A regional cultural art festival which was

recently held in Jakarta to celebrate the fifty years of Indonesian Independence was joined by participants from the twenty-seven provinces of Indonesia. The festival showed that there is a cultural dynamism in the regions. Each presented their local colours and incorporated modern dance choreographies. It provided an indication of the diversity of Indonesia in cultural tourism at present and in future.

### **Conclusion**

Bali is open to new cultural influences, for we wish to keep up with the latest national and international development in ways to improve ourselves, our facilities, and the quality of care for adapting to the world's repertoire of skills and techniques, as well as our own. We are confident that we will continue to make productive use of what is of value to us, and yet maintain our culture and our island as being truly Balinese.

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