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## The Revitalization of the Life of Traditional Arts in Indonesia

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### **Abstract:**

*To date, the implementation of local culture preservation hardly grabs the government's attention, given that nearly the entire allocation of funds, both at the central and local levels is always intended to finance physical development programs. The local culture development that does not receive priority shall result in the negligence of various types of traditional arts in Indonesia. Thus sooner or later, they will be heading to extinction if revitalization measures are not made. The writing examines the implementation of development programs in revitalizing the life of traditional arts. The results state there are measures of traditional arts revitalization, carried out by: (1) the Government of Indonesia, and (2) educational institutions.*

**Keywords:** Revitalization, traditional arts.

### **1. Background**

If we discuss the neglected sectors of development, the primary address is the traditional art. It is due to the development of traditional arts are deemed not to produce income concretely. Thereby, nearly the whole implementation of development sector is prioritized more on physical development, such as school buildings, roads, bridges, stadiums, beaches, markets, malls, hotels, means of transportation, and so on. As a result, the field of traditional arts tends to be neglected.

The implementation of local culture preservation program hardly grabs the government's attention, given that nearly the entire allocation of funds, both at the central and local levels is always intended to finance physical development programs that are more economical. Meanwhile, the culture development does not receive priority, resulting in various types of the neglected local culture, and eventually if revitalization measures are not made, sooner or later it will be heading to extinction.

To date, cultural sector and local culture are gradually marginalized. Such condition is resulted from several factors, including the globalization process that is dominated by Western culture has penetrated Indonesian territory, and in reality, there is no cultural resistance against Western culture. On the other hand, the local culture is deemed static and no longer adequate to fulfill the needs and expression of the local communities, whilst the presence of Western culture is considered dynamic and more appropriate to the characters of today's communities (Thoyibi, 2003).

At the moment, the development of tourism that is aspired to promote local culture has not been able to involve full communities' participation, implying that the participation is merely political rhetoric in supporting the tourism development pioneered by the government and businessmen. There are a large number of community lands being freed with government's standard price to support the development of tourism facilities. Following the development, the local communities cannot savor the developments directly and their lives have not changed much (Sukiada, 2007: 161-162). The exclusion of local communities leads in the underdeveloped local culture.

If the local culture can be preserved by being excavated, studied, and actualized in the life of the community, thus in turn, it can be utilized as the basis for strengthening the unity of the Indonesian that is comprised of various ethnic groups. Nevertheless, if the local culture is abandoned, according to Sultan Hamengkubuwono X (*Kedaulatan Rakyat*, June 19, 2004) it is similar with *wastra lungset ing sampiran* (wrinkly clothes on the hanger). The point is not to let the local culture being abandoned or neglected, but it should be preserved and managed for the benefits of the society, nation, and state.

As a nation, we claim to be highly cultured. Nonetheless in real daily life, we do not have a high appreciation for local culture. For example, the mass media coverage by the end of 2007 on the disappearance of five ancient statues belonged to the collection of Radya Pustaka Museum, Surakarta. Anyone who visited the place, especially prior to the disappearance of five ancient statues, generally did not so concern with the majority of the museum's collection. They tended to be careless towards the museum's collection. Only after the news surfaced about the theft of those five ancient statues belonged to the collection of Radya Pustaka Museum Surakarta, we then got full of anger (Suprpto, 2007). The government and the community these days are less appreciative of the cultural heritage. It is in contrast to the Japanese community who incredibly love their cultural heritage, as they realize that the cultural heritage that can be used as media of learning for the youth (Adhisakti, 2007).

In addition to the disappearance of the five statues, we are also preoccupied by the mass media coverage that is extremely disturbing, particularly for those who love and appreciate the local culture. It is due to claims of the Malaysian on the folk art *Reog Ponorogo* in late November 2007. Although at that moment, the Indonesian people were not fully healed from the wound over the claim of Maluku

folk song '*Rasa Sayange*' and Betawi folk song '*Jali-jali*', as well as batik craft as the belonging of neighboring country (Hafiz, 2007).

Particularly in response to the claim of the Malaysian, the artists of *Reog Ponorogo* performed demonstrations alongside thousands of citizens and community leaders in front of Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta. The demonstration was a form of protests against the Malaysian's actions that had claimed and committed plagiarism on the folk art *Reog Ponorogo* in the form of the art *Barongan*. The majority of the protesters who were wearing honor clothing of the *Warok* unfurled banners inscribed with the words condemning Malaysia, such as "Malaysia Committed Plagiarism on *Reog Ponorogo*", "Stop Plagiarism", and so forth. The issue of *Reog Ponorogo* and others are already enough. Hopefully similar cases will not happen again.

Not only *Reog Ponorogo*, the song *Rasa Sayange* and *Jali-jali*, as well as traditional batik craft possessed by the community, but there is still highly various local culture found mainly in rural areas. If we take a look back to the past, such as in the Dutch era, as by reported Pigeaud in his book *Javanche Volkvertoningen: Bijdragetot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk* (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938) there are thousands of folk art performed on stages in Java. Similarly, James Brandon in his book *Theatre in South East Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), stating that the number of performing arts in Southeast Asia is highly extensive, and the three-quarters belongs to Indonesia. Judging from the tremendous amount of arts at that time, as reported by Pigeaud and Brandon, it seems extremely glorious. Nevertheless, the situation has now changed, since the number of existing folk arts is left very few. In addition, the condition of folk art is very sad for being unmaintained, and if continues, surely it will be doomed to extinction. All this time, we often let our local culture stay in poor condition. We won't be even willing to appreciate the local culture if we are asked to. We will only gasp and feel the loss, upon knowing that there are other countries claiming our local culture as theirs.

Regarding the heart-wrenching news, it seems that we cannot just stand idly. It also implies that we should take a step to embrace the treasure of local culture, as well as define specific measures to make it hard to be stolen or claimed as the belonging of other countries. Therefore, the revitalization of local culture is something that is highly crucial to be done immediately. Moreover, the local cultural heritage can be declared to have the values dominated by the lives of the local communities.

In the current era of globalization, the local culture should be promoted again, that we won't lose our identity. The promotion of the local culture may include local language, local clothing, local performing arts, sound art, traditional food, traditional ceremonies, and so on (Dharmamulya, 1996: 20). Supposedly, those will support the speed of the development much, especially the development in the field of culture. Based on the needs to revive the local culture, the writing will focus on the issues of the revitalization of local culture, especially traditional art, with the expectation that the traditional arts can be used as one of the measures of cultural heritage preservation.

## 2. The Objectives of Revitalization

The implementation of the revitalization of the local culture is based on the assumption that all development programs hardly reach local culture. It results in the absence of the place for the local culture to develop. In fact, the proper cultural heritage is getting slumped, and even destroyed by the helplessness of the managers to maintain and use it maximally. In this regard, the financial support is the key to the preservation of cultural heritage activities (<http://kompas.com/0607/-31/jateng/39446.htm>, July 31, 2006). Therefore, the untouched local culture in development means that there are no government efforts to promote the local culture.

Besides, various facts suggest that until today, the government, starting from the presidents, governors, regents, to district heads tend to be insensitive to the fate of the lives of the various expressions of local culture, such as community's cultural arts. They understand the significance of art is merely for the sake of ceremonies, festivals, tourism and politics. As a result, various artistic expressions tend to be exploited for momentary interests (Nursahid, 2002). The absence of the authorities' attention results in the underdeveloped local culture in the development sector, thus its life is very alarming.

Indeed, we cannot blind eye to the fact that various types of local culture are deteriorating and even extinction. A Sundanese humanist, Saini KM reveals that folk art in the areas of Sunda (West Java), such as *pantun*, *reog*, *longser*, *sintren*, *ubruk*, *Sandiwara Sunda* and so on, increasingly getting scarce and can only be found on special occasions. In addition to increasingly scarce performance, what is meant by deterioration above means the degradation in the quality and number of the spectators-supporters. If they are no longer performed, it means that folk art has been destroyed and only remains as a part of history (Saini KM, 2003).

Whereas if observed, plenty of folk arts have a very high value and are precious, it can even be used as reference of values in the nation and society. If the folk art is endangered, then it must be a serious problem that has to be considered; in view of developed nations such as Japan and Europe that are successful to save and preserve folk art. For example, in Europe, people can still watch Greek classical drama, ballet, and opera. In Japan, people can still watch *Kabuki*, *Noh* and *Bunraku* theaters. However, in Indonesia, it is not easy to watch *Ogel*, *Pantun*, and *Tarawangsa* from West Java. These issues contain a problem that must be immediately addressed, if we do not want to lose such precious cultural heritage (Saini KM, 2003 and Adhisakti, 2007).

As mentioned above, James Brandon as a researcher of performing arts in Southeast Asia in the 1960s stated that the number of professional performing arts in Indonesia had reached more than half (three quarters) of the number contained throughout Southeast Asia. However, the huge number increasingly declines by day, *lebih-labih* with the presence of various forms of entertainment that is far cheaper, such as movie theaters, TV, video and compact disc (CD). In fact, recently the life of performing arts is getting worse with CD piracy (Soedarsono, 2003: 239).

When realization comes up, that the local properties will always become the victim of marginalization, thereby being marginalized, the whole communities (ethnic) need to redefine themselves to the local culture (Sayuti, 2008). The steps to redefine it can be made to revive the local culture's situation that is currently alarming. Reviving in this case also means upholding the values of community's local wisdom. Tuhusetyo in his paper entitled "Revitalization of Folk Art in the Midst of Global Civilization" points out that along

with the moving dynamics of the era in the globalization process; the art world is expected to participate actively in the conduct of enlightenment on the 'ill' civilization. Art is not just simply understood as an aesthetic product, but must be appreciated also as a cultural product that is capable of providing something meaningful for human beings (Tuhusetyo, 2007). Based on the problems mentioned, the revitalization of local culture is highly crucial to implement immediately.

### 3. The Life of Traditional Arts

To dismiss many parties that have the intention destroy the art, certainly there are steps to alter the mindset of the children that has been fostered in cultural value system since their childhood. Let's say that this is a step for the regeneration or cadre recruitment so that the children inherit the cultural value system that has been long maintained by their ancestors. The cultural value system is a conception living in the minds of the public. Usually, these values in the traditional ceremony serve as a guide to live among the society. Thereby, the system of cultural values can serve as the foundation of culture, including the norms in public life; hence the youth will immerse the importance of values inherited from by their ancestors. It will be wonderful if it has been fostered since their childhood with the intention that it will be institutionalized in lives. (Moertjipto, 1997: 54).

In Indonesia, traditional art is one of the cultural treasures that has not receive the same amount if attention in terms of its conservation and development (Ahimsa, 2009: 1). The preservation of traditional art has yet to achieve a place in the hearts of the society. Indeed, there is a type of traditional art that still generates attention, as it plays a role in the life of the community. However, other types of traditional art do not get attention, as the users society are already old, while they do not prepare the successor generation. As soon as the generation of the traditional art users passes away, the traditional arts that they once pursued will become extinct.

The whole traditional arts in Indonesia hardly have a regeneration of artists (Gbaden, 2014: 22). It implies that the supporting community does not specifically prepare the substitutes who will be able to continue performing the traditional arts in the future. For example, the traditional art *kethoprak*, *wayang wong* are now rarely seen or they are arguably waiting for their death, including the types of traditional folk arts vastly living in the rural areas, such as *jathilan*, *reyog*, *badhui*, *slawatan* are gradually heading to extinction, alongside high number of old and deceased artists. It indicates a major problem in the life of traditional arts that receive less attention from any party.

In addition to the absence of regeneration, there is not even a single party or institution fully supporting the life of traditional art. Is there any party or institution responsible to contribute in preserving the existence of traditional art, such as *kethoprak* in Central Java, *Ludruk* in East Java, *Makyong* in Sumatra, and hundreds of traditional folk arts in rural areas? Certainly the answer will be no. Indeed, there are one or two institutions which are willing to support the traditional arts, for instance, Ramayana Ballet in the complex of Prambanan Temple, Yogyakarta, since 1961 until the present day. Ramayana Ballet is funded by the tourism department. Since the one with interest is tourism sector, Ramayana performances are subject to the interests of tourism. Be it in the time, space, energy, or costs should adjust to the interests of tourism.



Figure 1: *Jathilan*: folk dance is still performed in rural communities, Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
(Photo: Suichi Osawa, 2011).



Figure 2: *Badhui*: Islamic folk dances that are seldom performed in Sleman, Indonesia  
(Photo: Deni Sugiarti, 2013).



Figure 3: *Slawatan Laras Madya*: Islamic Javanese music that is rarely staged in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.  
(Photo: Sutyono, 1997).

Besides Ramayana, it also applies to *Wayang Wong* Yogyakarta, performed in ward of *Sri Manganti*, Yogyakarta Palace, every Sunday at 10 until 12 am. *Wayang wong* can be performed due to the role of the palace and the community groups around Yogyakarta are able to perform interchangeably. Although the fund from Tourism Agency in supporting the show extremely minimal, the spirit of the artists, either from the palace or outside the palace is enough to set the fire for performing struggle for the sake of the preservation and establishment of *wayang wong* with Yogyakarta style. It appears that currently, only these two types of art that has been the target of tourism to revive. The remaining various traditional art in rural areas do not receive attention from any party. Both arts receiving injections of funds in each of their performance, although is not large in amount, is still capable of supporting them.

To date, there have never been strategic plans that are managed properly for the preservation or development of traditional arts (Amuah, 2014: 85), whether from artists themselves, parties or institutions having the intention to preserve the traditional art. It is in contrast with other sectors, such as economics, politics, security sectors that always have capacity and continue to live out for being managed by interested parties. The field of arts in Indonesia is deemed incapable of providing welfare for the society, particularly physical welfare, such as economic prosperity, as the economic development in Indonesia appears to be guided only by economic considerations (Sayuti, 2009: 1). Whatever done by people are always connected to the matter of the exchange rate, the value of dollars and rupiahs. The economic value becomes a regulator of the entire development activities in Indonesia. In this case, the culture that is deemed to incapable of fostering the community's economy should pull out of the circulation in development plan. As if the dignity of the nation is determined by economic development.

Nonetheless, a nation that has already reached an advanced civilization, in addition the supports of economic development is also determined by the level of cultural activities possessed. How a nation manages democracy, promotes political development, sets up security, distributes development funds for the welfare of all the people depend on the degree of civilization of the nation. The level of civilization depends on the carrying capacity of the communities as the agent living culture and developing dynamically.

#### 4. The Measures Taken by Indonesian Government

In Indonesia, there is a type of traditional art that is developing physically, but the values contained therein gradually become shallower. It is the result of many people's aspirations and the interference of various parties who actually are not authorized in developing traditional arts. All parties would like to conduct preservation according to their own taste and understanding (Hastanto, 1992/1993: 226).

Therefore, the government holds measures in fostering traditional arts. Such measures cover two targets. The first target is the traditional arts festival is intended for school students. The second target is the traditional arts festival for the artists living in the community. Via traditional arts festival, the interests of the students and the community who begin to love the traditional arts can be seen. It appears from the large amount of traditional arts that are starting to be on fire. They are preparing for the festival since the beginning by practicing diligently. The practice is monitored by a professional trainer. With numerous practices, it seems that the preparation of the festival participants is very mature.

The traditional arts festival events frequently regarded as a platform for the seeding of traditional art lovers should be taken in consideration in the future. The procurement traditional arts festival is one method of the government to show their concern for the traditional art that is now considered endangered. The authorities would always be accused for being the forefront party that should preserve the life traditional arts. Therefore, in the state organization is also expected to have the budgeting for traditional arts, hence the government is obliged to hold a traditional arts festival every year.

In addition to the role of government in dealing with the art, there are also private parties or currently is commonly known by the name of *investors* who help preserve the traditional arts. Nowadays, some private companies also co-finance the life of traditional arts. They express their desire to cooperate with the community who maintain the traditional arts in their region. Nonetheless, with a note that the traditional art fostered must comply with the interests of the builder. For example, the builder determines the time format, and demonstration of traditional arts. At the end of the day, the performance time which originally should last for two hours is later pressed into a quarter of an hour. The show format of that once is seemed intact, is later forced to be packed into a more practical one, although it no longer seems intact. The traditional art exhibition which is originally used strict requirements is modified without using the terms. What only matter is that it should carry on. Thereby, it is how the traditional arts will be like if handled by the investors having different interests. All means and rules are dictated by special interest groups. The direct result is predictable, that the traditional art that is originally rooted in people's lives should adhere to uncertain paths. The community clearly sees the uncertain direction of changes, for example, traditional arts are becoming obscene, brutal, and the most severe is the superficial contents.

The type of art is declared to develop if the impact on the human spirit can speed up changes for the better. Conversely, though physically or in quantity, it seems to thrive but does not provide good impact on the development of the human soul, such as being shallow, does not sharpen up feelings, more obscene, more violent, more brutal, more sadistic, thus the art that is not declared to be developed, but instead, diminished in quality. (Hastanto, 1992/1993: 233). It can be seen that the arrival of investors to develop the traditional art is in fact even destroying instead of preserving as have been done by the communities.

#### 5. Revitalization Measures via Educational Institutions

In the curriculum of arts education, as in the learning process of dance at the State University of Yogyakarta, they teach learning materials in the form of classical dance and folk dance. Classical dance is originated from Surakarta and Yogyakarta Palaces, whilst the folk dances are originating from rural areas. The examples of classical dances of Yogyakarta Palace are *Srimpi Muncar*, *Srimpi Pandelori*, and *Bedaya Angon Sekar*. The examples for classical dances of Surakarta Palace are *Srimpi Gandakusuma*, *Srimpi Sangupati*, *Srimpi Daradasih*, *Bedaya Lala*, and *Bedaya Gambirsawit*.

Similarly, folk dances originating from other regions are also taught. There are dances from: *Banyumas*, *Sunda*, *Bali*, *East Java*, *Minang*, and *Makassar*. Foreign dances are even taught. Entirely is packaged into a curriculum that is developed time after time. Each student receives the material of dance, starting from local, national, to international dances. Hence, the students are equipped with abilities of art materials in relation to the community culture that can be understood as an application of public aesthetic and ethical, both in the local and international society. In that sense, the students are trained to perform local and global interaction.

The art materials are supposedly taught in schools and universities (Katz, 2013: 67). In Indonesia, there are seven universities actively teach classical dance and folk dance. Besides universities, there are also high schools teaching these dances. There are ten high schools that actively teach classical dances and folk dances. For example, in Yogyakarta there is Higher of Education of Art, namely Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI) and the Department of Dance Education at State University of Yogyakarta. These two colleges are highly intense in teaching such arts. In addition, there is a vocational high school specializing in the teaching classical arts and folk arts. Through the learning process of the art, it means those universities and high schools have an active role in preserving classical and folk arts.

The efforts undertaken by the community to revive traditional arts become a highly significant part to be recorded and studied by universities, such as those routinely done by dance students of Yogyakarta State University. In 'independent' course, the students directly learn in the society of one form of traditional dance. This course requires the students not to rely on the materials previously given by their lecturers, instead they must go out of their campus in order to directly seek the knowledge from the society. This process takes place within two months. Through this process, the students are required to obtain a traditional dance material. The dance may come from the palace or pockets of culture in rural areas.

Those endured by the students are a step of revitalization or an attempt to revive the figure of traditional art of which in today's situation and condition is rarely performed. For instance, *Bedaya Glondhongpring* Dance from Surakarta Palace is rarely performed.

Through 'independent' course, the dance is learned by a group of nine students. *Empu* (dance master of the palace) teaches the dance materials to the students who come to Surakarta.

Every year, the dance students of Yogyakarta State University are directly sent in the midst of the community to learn one form of traditional dance repertoire. Besides Surakarta Palace, they also go to Yogyakarta Palace, Mangkunegaran Temple, and Pakualaman Temple. In fact, they are also sent to enter remotes area in villages of numerous districts, such as Sleman, Bantul, Magelang, Kulonprogo, Purworejo, Banyumas, Wonosobo, etc.

## 6. Conclusion

The majority of the life of traditional arts in Indonesia is worrying. If rescuing measures are not immediately taken, they will become extinct soon. Therefore, the government conducts measures for cultural conservation which are being actualized in the form of revitalization (reviving) the local culture. The revitalization measures are embodied in the form of revitalization in the life of traditional arts via activities of program undertaken by government agencies and educational institutions. The traditional arts festivals are held via the government agencies and attended by the community. The traditional arts learning is held via educational institutions and attended by students. In general, the revitalization measures can implement the preservation of traditional arts cultural heritage. Based on the interests to revive the local culture, this revitalization may serve as one measure of cultural heritage preservation. The term revitalization covers large amount of social and cultural issues, in the sense that it can be used to revive numerous problematic regions, sites of ancient culture, until the life of endangered traditional arts.

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