



**សន្និសីទអន្តរជាតិលើកទី១៤ ស្តីពី
តម្លៃវប្បធម៌អាស៊ីប៉ាស៊ីហ្វិក**

**The 14th International Conference on
Asia Pacific Cultural Values**

វប្បធម៌ ប្រវត្តិ និងហេតុការណ៍

CULTURE, HISTORY AND PRIDE

ថ្ងៃពុធ ១២កើត ខែកត្តិក ដល់ថ្ងៃសៅរ៍ ១៥កើត ខែមិគសិរ ឆ្នាំច សំរឹទ្ធិស័ក ព.ស.២៥៦២
ត្រូវនឹងថ្ងៃទី១៩ ដល់ថ្ងៃទី២២ ខែធ្នូ ឆ្នាំ២០១៨ ដៅសណ្ឋាគារអង្គរសេនធីរី ក្រុងសៀមរាប ខេត្តសៀមរាប

December 19-22, 2018, Angkor Century Hotel, Siem Reap, CAMBODIA

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The 14th International Conference on Asia Pacific Cultural Values
Culture, History and Pride

រៀបចំដោយមជ្ឈមណ្ឌលស្រាវជ្រាវអាស៊ីនៃរាជបណ្ឌិត្យសភាកម្ពុជា
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MAINTAINING A TRADITION AS AN EFFORT TO RESPOND A MORE CHALLENGING ERA: CASE STUDY ON INDONESIA

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Abstract

In such an open era like today, when there are no time and space boundary, it is very easy to share any kind of information which is almost exactly the same as the source. It is supported by the advance of technology and becomes the bridge/media to present some facts for us and these facts sometimes surprise us. The surprises come so profusely and many responses emerge because of them. There are many who are reluctant to get involved, but there also many who respond it with euphoria. This new kind of information is able to distract the tenable form that we already own and do. For example, traditional performing seems no longer attractive to the youngster anymore nowadays. They no longer have a desire to watch or even to maintain it. There are many new forms which draw many attentions and these new forms are imitated and developed based on some interest and ability. The new forms are considered to be more attractive and fun to watch and do. Some performing art, which is considered more suitable with today's era, are spreading to young people. Indeed, they have their own world. However, it is important to give insight about performing art as a cultural inheritance. This inheritance, with its incomparable uniqueness and beauty, is too shamed to be neglected. Similarly, all the wisdom in it, will it be decreasing until no longer recognized? This article does not merely envy and blame the power and attraction from outside, but more on the offering of some alternatives to balance their influence. We should give more effort to greet and get closer to the young generation to maintain our tradition together.

Key words: Performing art; tradition; Indonesia

Introduction: A Flowing Tradition

Being involved in the cultural wave, one cannot imagine how it develops into such a vortex today. In this context, a culture with its traditional performing arts is cornered and getting less and less fans from youngsters. Instead of rejecting it, they tend to choose to keep their distance from the traditional performing arts. It is so common to see how traditional arts is supported only by elders, while young people step aside as they found more interesting choices. Their choices are considered to have some advantages over the old tradition.

Various choices from various sources come in different forms – either audio, visual, or audio-visual. It comes by the advance of technology with its surprising speed and accuracy. The information it spreads online is almost as soon as and as accurate as the occurrence of the event itself. The development of this advanced

technology has become a bridge for bringing varied information. Meanwhile, the tempting choices are sometimes also brought directly by their owners, and even followers.

Its sudden and booming arrival often makes us shock and feel illiterate, we even think that we are not ready yet to respond. Unfortunately, the advance in information technology is sometimes used for wrong purposes. Many cases in Indonesia show the appearance of hoaxes causing anxieties to societies that makes Indonesian government feel the need of regulating the issue of information technology. As many surprises quickly come into their existence, they receive different responses from young people. Those responses can be grouped into three categories based on their expressions – in audio, visual, or audio-visual forms.

The first group consists of young people who show euphoric response as the new thing has mesmerized them and has distracted them from their previously owned things. Traditional performing arts, for example, has become less interesting for these young people, that they feel reluctant to watch it, even if it is for free. This group no longer continues its old tradition, instead they choose the new forms of culture. They find that the new tradition has some new forms; that they, then, imitate or even develop them as what they like and what they can do. Those new forms are considered to be more attractive and bring more fun to watch, to do, and to enjoy. Performing arts regarded as the spirit of the age has flourished in this group. For example, during the Indonesian Dance Festival in 6 – 10 November 2018 held in Jakarta, majority of young choreographer who performed their works had released themselves from their traditional root. Though it was not seen as a mistake, it has brought up a big question: why they think that creativity in their performances means that they have to retreat or release themselves from tradition. Sal Murgiyanto, a critic and writer of performing arts also expressed his disappointment about this issue.

Springing up like mushrooms after the rain, these groups appear consisting of both male and female youngsters with their same ideas and beliefs. They appear mostly in big cities. In its development, some of the members of those groups release themselves and create new groups; some of them still create similar performance, while others create different arts. They, then, choose to join groups they like.

The second group, nevertheless, exists in a more moderate area instead of adapting and imitating the whole forms of arts like the first group. They are interested in new forms as well as appreciate the forms. Though they have many interesting choices brought by the advance of global technology that eliminates any boundaries, they still show their respect to old tradition by continuing performing it. The continuation of old tradition is integrated with new aspects; thus, it creates traditional works with new spirit and new works with traditional spirit.

The last group consists of them who are loyal to the old tradition. Though they are also mesmerized, they has decided not to go with the new flow. As they have various backgrounds, they feel fit in this group, being the artists or audience of traditional performing arts. They do not enjoy nor follow the new wave imitated and followed by other groups.

Those all show how powerful the external attraction is that it is able to set aside, and even, to alter part of traditional performing arts. In recent time, it is impossible for a culture (in this case, a traditional performing arts) to develop without intersecting with others. When supporters of a culture passively react to a situation, they likely to take for granted (Damono, 2004). This may happen everywhere in this world, including Indonesia; today's generation as well as the future one have a big responsibility of maintaining the continuity of their culture (Haryono, 2000).

This article does not address the issue on the strength of external power and its effect; rather it investigates whether some real actions are needed to respond to the situation. Thus, instead of being envy and regretful toward the newcomer that disturb our traditional performing arts, it is better to discuss the situation.

Preserving Tradition – Opening Self

For centuries, Indonesian people have intersected with other foreign societies; and it still continues until today. The Indonesians tended to open themselves to the arrival of foreigners, as well as to the cultures they bring. Though the government has regulated a concept about maintaining and developing Indonesian culture – including the traditional performing arts – many ways can be employed to react to foreign cultures that enter into our societies nowadays.

The power of preservative to defend themselves as well as the progressive power to develop them actually exist in every form of arts as it is supported by its people. Being powerful or weak is a matter of choice depending on its people's awareness. The weaker people defend themselves, the stronger foreign culture penetrates into their society. Thus, the creativity of a society will find its own way grow and develop its culture (Hamengkubuwono, 2011). Both these abilities sometimes occur in paradox.

The Indonesian government has often called upon the importance of maintaining and developing culture in every part of Indonesia, especially the traditional performing arts as an important element. This has been followed by issuing some regulations from national to regional levels realized by appropriate activities. For example, curriculums employed in formal schools – elementary school, junior high schools, and senior high schools – contain some materials about traditional performing arts. Some regions even complete their curriculums by including contents about their own local languages.

Being called upon or not, the society in Bali, for example, has started maintaining and developing their own traditional performing arts in prior by using certain ways. Two groups of almost identical forms serve to two different purposes. The first group consists of forms performed in various rituals. Those forms are employed for glorifying God the Almighty – the forms that should be honored and preserved in many of their religious rituals. The other group consisting of almost identical forms to those performed in religious rituals is shown in performances as tourist attraction. Those performances, however, aim mainly to entertain the tourists and to maintain their arrivals to Bali. Though they perform similar forms in those two different occasions, the purposes of their performances are different.

In another region, West Java, the local government has a policy that is similar to Bali yet with different implementation. Every Wednesday, the societies – especially the school-age children – are required to do *Nyunda*. On that day, they are asked, at least, to speak Sundanese language, or to wear clothes resembling Sundanese people. Moreover, students who propose educational scholarships are obliged to possess some skills, like playing *angklung* (Sundanese traditional musical instrument made from bamboo) or practicing Sundanese martial arts called *pencak silat*, by showing their certificates as evidence. Some supporting instruments, such as traditional musical instruments, especially *angklung*, are available in their schools and art group in their society.

In addition to Bali and West Java, some other regions in Indonesia have also implemented the government regulation in various ways yet with similar purposes. For example, some efforts have been done to discover many traditional performing

arts, which were almost or have been extinct. Almost all local governments perform those efforts for preserving the traditional arts; and similar activities are also accomplished by all Higher Education institution. The results of the discoveries, in forms of reconstruction and revitalization, are then performed to societies and documented in audio-visual form by supporting institutions.

Unfortunately, most of those efforts finish at the documenting level, while actually those preservable inheritance of aesthetics should also be taught to others. The teaching process should not finish at form level, but it has also to be understood that the forms are supported by symbols representing people's local wisdom. Some results of dance reconstructions have been taught by Arts Higher Education institutions to their students, some others in greater numbers, however, are still stored only as data. If the frequency of performances of those dances are increased by presenting performing arts artists, it is highly possible to inspire those students.

In addition, the government also supports and facilitates some collaborations of inter-arts, inter-region, or cross-regions. Many choreographers, musicians, and artists, especially young artists are interested in the events. The initial events launched by the government act as a trigger for other continuing events. Many of them continue the events without waiting for the government's other projects. Those collaborations of inter-arts and inter-region seemed to attract the attention of artists, especially the young artists.

Another way to promote performing arts that is executed by the government is through 'learning with the maestro'. This annual event is held in two weeks by involving a numbers of male and female high school students all over Indonesia. They are given a chance through selection to learn certain performing arts and its management from its expertise. During the program, the students live near or in the house of the maestro, while the government provides all the funds. A group of students learn from maestros of Bali performing arts, some others learn from contemporary performing arts, and other groups learn about the management of arts performance from the experts.

This model, that have been carried out for three years, is likely to gain those youngsters' attention. As they live in the community or in the maestro's house which is likely different from their own environment, they can learn new things. They are introduced to the environment of the performing arts they learn, meanwhile, they also learn about the local wisdom that supports it.

Miroto (2018), an expert of Indonesian contemporary dance, informed that the program can be seen as a proper way to introduce and familiarize performing arts and its various supporting elements to young people. The number of the students who apply for joining the program increases every year; the arts maestros selected for being the mentors are also different every year. Nevertheless, the two-week program needs to be re-considered as it may disturb the students' learning process at school. Those students also need to get another continuing chance, instead of one-time learning program.

In addition to the model, several kingdoms, especially the four kingdoms in Central Java and Special Region of Yogyakarta, really impose their efforts to draw youngsters closer to their traditions. Those four kingdoms, which no longer become a center of political activities, now open their doors to any societies who are willing to learn about their performing arts, as they are now serving as the successors of the traditional culture. The shadow puppet, gamelan, and traditional dance are among the performing arts interestingly to learn. Many society members, particularly the youth,

show their enthusiasm while learning those arts; furthermore, when they are involved in the performances.

In general, trainings or teaching of traditional dance and classical dance of Yogyakarta style in non-formal institutions in Yogyakarta have been practiced for its continuity (Saearani, 2014). It might also be important to allow any modifications or changing forms to achieve some qualities.

Therefore, the societies can learn about cultural diversity. The continuity of a traditional culture can also be preserved by involving the presence of other societies who visit its place. All members from any societies are indeed being responsible and obliged to preserve and develop any cultures. As an inheritance, a culture's prolonged existence in the future is in the hands of its inheriting generations – the society who accepts it today or at the later time (Kusmayati, 2018).

It is also for its very reason that the government give awards to artists of traditional performing arts, either women or men. The artists are generally those who are engaged in their own art forms for quite a long time.

Closing

To balance the existence of traditional performing arts with the arrival of new wave in Indonesia is not an easy and simple matter. Indonesians have proved to be persistence in preserving and developing their cultures. In one side, this nation's flexibility and openness to foreign elements have also been tested since long ago. When global era starts to spread, nonetheless, the existence of traditional performing arts comes into questions. Though the traditional performing arts can still be found in many regions; some contemporary music, *wayang kulit* (leather shadow puppet, dances, and other art forms also appear with its developing foreign elements.

The government has also made some powerful attempts to create the balance. Instead of blaming the arrival of those foreign elements, the government has played its own part. There are some other steps that can still be performed by the government, such as having some discussion among the government as the regulator, facilitators, and other elements to talk about this issue. It may also be important to invite young artists in the discussion; and other stakeholders also need to be invited. It is also crucial to provide funds for such activities, despite our lacks. Though for preparing all those things need persistence and patience, we can rely on our sense of belongings and responsibility to put aside any individual interest. Societies are also looking forward to any information and socialization about those discussions or other events.

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