

The Management of Ramayana Tourism Performing Arts in Indonesia and Thailand

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The conservation of traditional performing arts in many countries that inherit ethnic arts is the topic to be discussed in this research. Until now, the countries still rely on traditional conserving societies to manage ethnic arts. The conserving strategy through tradition, however, cannot overcome age advancement, and it is not only failed to empower the existence of performing artists but also undermine professional chance of young artists. Tourism performing arts are then introduced in aligning with the goals of fostering, conserving and preventing ethnic arts from extinction. Technical matters of presenting performing arts are delegated to the show organizer. The arts are then presented on particular place and time for the favor of tourism. The presentation of the arts starts to exit from the shadows of tradition and religion, and goes toward presentation metamorphosis. This research is aimed to review the tendency of *maecenas* (art conservers) as the enforcing agents of tourism performing arts. The role of art conservers in tourism destinations in Indonesia and Thailand will be elaborated in this research. Indonesia destination are indicated by *Kecak Ramayana* played in Uluwatu, Bali, and *Ramayana Ballet* presented in Prambanan, whereas Thailand is represented by *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung* in Bangkok. Data collection method includes observation and document review. Analysis technique is interpretation, and result of analysis shows that the conservation of tourism performing arts, especially those playing Ramayana story, is conducted by considering several aspects, such as: (1) aspect of place that helps audiences to regain their recollections, (2) aspect of time that gives audiences exotic sensations, and (3) aspect of *maecenas* (art conservers), especially relating with strategic roles or actions of rescue, protection and empowerment conducted by traditional custom organization, governing institution, and rulers.

Keywords: Tourism performing arts, Ramayana, art conservers, conservation.

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INTRODUCTION

The conservation of traditional performing arts in Indonesia and Thailand was greatly depending on the management of tourism performing arts for the goal of generating alternative source of foreign exchange, or in other words, developing tourism sector by emphasizing *green economy approach* [1]. Researcher has conducted close observation. Traditional arts are enlivened for entertaining audiences when they visit tourism destinations in Indonesia or in Thailand.

Transforming the management of traditional performing arts from the function of conservation to the goal of entertaining audiences is an anticipative strategy to respond art consumers' tastes in order to maintain the existence of traditional performing arts [2]. Performing arts are often packaged as tourism arts that always aim to present exoticism of ethnic, history and entertaining attractions.

Ramayana performing arts are presented as tourism performing arts played at tourism destinations in Indonesia and Thailand. It is a precious strategy that represents a positive step to create imaging effect, or fantasy, at tourism destinations [3]. Imaging or fantasy, therefore, is the ultimate outcome of the conservation of traditional performing arts. It is expected that this outcome will empower the existence of traditional artists and provide job opportunity to young artists who have academic degree in performing arts [4].

Main goal of tourism performing arts is to rescue the existence of traditional performing arts to prevent it from being crushed by the change of aesthetical values and artistical perspectives. Art function has changed, and this change already occurred in Bali [5]. Any activities related with the art in Bali are handled and managed by Bali-based tourism entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs can be private or

even government. Such different management style does not matter as long as the goals are emphasized on conserving traditional performing arts and generating foreign exchange [1].

In previous researches, it was told that the existence of mask puppet traditional arts and prehistoric destinations in Tumpang District have been managed for the sake of tourism. However, these are not well developed because there is no synergistic and collaborative work between related-governments and tourism travel agents. The most immediate consequence is that visitors who go for Bromo only pass by this District [6]. Research conducted by Soedarsono shows that traditional performing arts need new package to smoothen its metamorphosis [7]. Moreover, Richards and Wilson in their book titled *Tourism, Creativity, and Development* [8] have said that tourism management needs creativity in exploring unique space, time and presentation in presenting ethnic culture characteristics.

Traditional performing arts are not only enjoyed on special place and time, but also presented with traditional rites or customs of conserver societies. Although special conditions exist, it can still be played by a phone call from tourism travel agents [9]. Visitors are then entertained on time. Traditional performing arts are affected no longer by tradition and religion but by *art metamorphosis* or *art acculturation* [7]. Taking into account these explanations, the objective of this research is to conduct a review on strategic or creative steps taken by *maecenas* (art conservers). In particular, this review is focused on the presentation of tourism performing arts that play Ramayana Stories in tourism destinations in Indonesia and Thailand.

METHOD

Method of research is qualitative descriptive model. Data were collected with interview with key informants, such as: Sumardi (58 years old), the manager of Ramayana Ballet Society of Wisnu Murti; Rinto Widyanto (56 years old), the Chair of Ballet Department at Indonesian Art Institute in Denpasar; and Surasak Jamnongsorn (52 years old) (a lecturer of ethnomusicology for Department of Tradisional Thai and Asia Music, Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University). The objective of this review is to understand and describe the roles of *maecenas* (art conservers) as policy makers to conserve Ramayana traditional performing arts as traditional performing arts. Roles of *maecenas* are understood by observing the presentation of traditional performing arts at tourism destinations in Indonesia and Thailand. Indonesia destinations are represented by *Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana* in Bali and *Prambanan's Ramayana Ballet* in Klaten, Central Java, whereas Thailand is represented by *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung* in Bangkok. Data validity is determined with triangulation, and interpretive analysis is conducted against attitudes and

actions of the organizers of tourism performing arts in Indonesia and Thailand.

ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Research attempts to examine the roles of *maecenas* in presentation of traditional performing arts in Indonesia and Thailand. The analyzed data include presentation technique, creative agents' actions, and audience behavior. Field observation shows that traditional performing arts are presented as tourism attraction, and this attraction is managed differently. The management of tourism performing arts is understood through dimensions of place, time, distance and destination. Each dimension is different according to opportunity and interest of visitors [10]. Tourism travel agents sometimes take this into consideration, and by this, they guide tourists to the art presentation at tourism destinations. Two factors are significant in the process, namely, allocation of time and cost.

Prambanan's Ramayana Ballet is usually presented on Prambanan Open Stage at night. Travel agents just take visitors to the site, either only to watch the presentation or to be combined with dinner package. They charge visitors at IDR 400,000 for first class ticket and IDR 125,000 for economic class ticket. All these tickets are not including visiting *Candi Prambanan* because such visit is only done from morning to afternoon. Almost same management style is applied at the presentation of *Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana* in Bali. Before watching this performing art, visitors must buy entry ticket at *Pura Uluwatu* for IDR 30,000. After holding ticket, either visitors or travel agents can decide whether they watch the art or not. If time and cost are available, visitors can pay IDR 100,000 for time more or less of two hours.

The management of tourism performing arts in Indonesia and Thailand is different to each other. The reason can be due to managerial and technical matters. This difference implicates to presentation technique, presentation time, presentation duration, attraction and audience facility. Besides, some visitors do not specifically see or really care to Ramayana story presentation despite its attractive packaging. Management style of tourism performing arts in Indonesia and Thailand can be explained as following:

Prambanan's Ramayana Ballet – Indonesia

The presentation of tourism performing arts on Prambanan Open Stage is played by groups of performers on fair schedule. All groups are the members of Roro Jonggrang Foundation. Such management style has been applied since 1961 [11]. Art presentation on Prambanan Open Stage is then popular with a term "*Prambanan's Ramayana Ballet*" [12].

Every group is given fair opportunity to present their performance art, either on open stage or in hall (close stage), which is usually held from March to

October. Groups that play on open stage can involve more or less 100 persons. Every group is given same allocation of production fund. Every group manage this fund autonomously without intervention of the Foundation (Sumardi, interview on August 30th, 2019).

Since 1999, art presentation in Prambanan has involved 2 groups of Yogyakarta style performers and 3-4 groups of Surakarta style performers. Every group is given same chance to play either on open stage or in hall. Every group periodically follows presentation schedule prepared by the management of Prambanan Tourism Park. The willingness to deliver presentation is considered as a principal commitment to support the management [13].

Audiences are managed in transparent way through cooperation with tourism travel agents. Audiences can be arranged either only to see the art presentation or to do this while having a dinner. Time and destination are ascertained according to this arrangement, and therefore, really conditioned at more or less than 2 hours. For student visitors, they are directed to see the art presentation for the intention of appreciating art works (Sumardi, interview on August 25th, 2019).

Roro Jonggrang Foundation has once faced a difficult situation after Bali bombing. Lack of visitors put the management into financial distress. Strategic step taken by the management is building emotional bonding with school institutions. Student tourism packet is promoted where students are given special discounts. It is expected that Prambanan tourism journey will give students something to recollect for the next 5 to 10 years. Former students, when they are adult, can reminisce this recollection by visiting Prambanan site to see Ramayana Ballet.

Prambanan's Ramayana Ballet plays several episodes starting from *Sayembara Sinta to Sinta Obong*. Separate episode may be played only if the conditions are possible. Presentation of each episode is allocated at the same length, precisely more or less than 2 hours. Foreign visitors are usually allocated to the art presentation site after they have a dinner and take a relax, or take a break in the middle of art presentation and watch it again after the break (Sumardi, interview on August 25th, 2019). *Prambanan's Ramayana Ballet* becomes a memorable event when it is played during eclipse. Audiences consider this moment as a romantic situation and arousing exotic sensations. At least, it gives "sedation effect" that they do not feel a thing until they finish the spectacle in time allocation of 2 hours. After the show, they are given chance to take pictures with main players, especially Shinta, Rama, or Hanoman, either on or off stage.

Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana in Bali – Indonesia

The presentation of *Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana* is held in the environment of *Pura Uluwatu*, an ancient site locating at South Kuta District, Badung-Bali Regency, Indonesia. The visitors of this art presentation are conditioned by tourism travel agents. Main goal of this conditioning is to enjoy the sensation of ancient site on ocean cliff's edges and also the beautiful sunset scenery.

All visitors must pay entry ticket for IDR 30,000. They are then required to wear *saput* (cloth wrapped around the waist) or any cloths to cover the open thigh. All these covers must be returned when visitors arrive at exit door. It is done as an ethic on the sacred site, and visitors mostly find this as exotic.

Tourist guide officers wear custom clothes and they appear themselves like ethnic locals. They serve guests professionally. Travel agents, however, do not specialize to escort visitors to *Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana*. The charge is only required at *Pura*, and so far, the available time allocation is adequate for seeing ancient site and waiting for sunset on the cliff edge. This sensation is enjoyable because Uluwatu cliff has height more or less than 97 meters above sea level. If audiences want more times for watching *Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana*, they are charged with IDR 100,000. Ticket counter is opened at 17.00 pm of Central Time Zone. Beyond that, ticket is not given because it is mostly sold out in 30 minutes after opening.

After buying ticket, visitors enter the presentation site and choose the seat randomly. There are more or less than 1,500 seats provided, and most of them are occupied in more or less than 30 minutes before the show. Riyanto determined that *Uluwatu's Kecak Ramayana* is the best spot for gathering because the selected time for presentation is time that provides exotic sensation. Historically, *Kecak Ramayana* is a performing art with traditional ritual background, namely *Ritual Sanghyang*. It was Walter Spies who suggested that *Ritual Sanghyang* should also be functioned as entertainment. A dance legend, named Wayan Limbat, then put Ramayana stories as main repertoires in the rite [14].

At 18.00 pm of Central Time Zone, the presentation starts after audiences are arranged to the seat by male and female officers using *handy talkie* as their communication devices in coordinating the process of presentation.

Officers who coordinate audiences are selected from the surrounding society. Recruitment process is handled by *sekaa* and *banjar*, and the selected individual is mostly professional, such as dance experts, traditional musicians, and traditional custom scholars. None of them are wearing public servant uniform. This fact emphasizes that the responsibility to conserve

performing arts remains on the hand of custom organizations despite its commercial and entertainment goals. Number of audiences is always around 1,500 persons per presentation and it is surely benefiting the existence of performing art groups, and particularly, also custom conservator societies in the environment of *Pura Uluwatu*.

The management of tourism performing arts in Uluwatu can be understood as Richards and Wilson said, which is that creative tourism management is oriented toward (a factor of) presentation space (environment) and presentation time [8].

Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung in Bangkok – Thailand

The management of *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung* involves presenting this performance art at special theatre building, and it was a commitment made by King of Thailand, Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X). This high-class information was obtained after conducting internal study for more or less than 2 years (Jamnongsorn, interview on September 11th, 2017). In the beginning, local citizens did not like very much with such theatre entertainment. The situation was almost similar to what happened with Sriwedari Mask Puppet in Surakarta when no more than 20 persons watched the presentation every night. No travel agents are dare to take visitors to this Javanese classical entertainment.

King of Thailand has made positive step. Ticket price to *Grand Palace* is set to be affordable by many travel agents, which is then expected that the agents will take visitors to there. Ticket is charged of 500 Baths, which already include riding the commute vehicles to the performance buildings and watching tourism performing arts at *Khon Theater* and *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung*.

For visitors who desire to watch performance arts at *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung* and also insist on entering *Bangkok Grand Palace* are charged with the combined ticket of 500 Baths. However, almost all travel agents do not plan for going to *Khon Theater* possibly because the time is possibly already allocated to visit another sites.

Theater building of *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung* stands faraway from *Grand Palace*, which precisely is about 2 kilometers. Distance is a constraining factor to travel agents. They often avoid the theater building after escorting visitors to *Grand Palace*. If some visitors insist on going to theater building, these stubborn visitors risk of not getting pickup transport to *Grand Palace*. If they are patient enough to wait for transportation, they can ride in the commute vehicles that take the other group of visitors from *Grand Palace*. Furthermore, other problem is that there is no decent parking lot for bus or passenger

vehicles nearby theater buildings. Whatever the problem is, combining entry tickets to *Grand Palace* and *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung* is a wise option, and it may be good example of efforts to support the viability of classical performance arts. Each theater building has a capacity of 500 seats and it is never fully occupied. Despite these problems, the decision to combine entry tickets for some theater buildings might save the life of the buildings and improve the welfare of *Grand Palace* keepers and performing artists at *Khon Theater*. This provide good lessons for the management of Surakarta Sriwedari Park. In case of Surakarta Sriwedari Park, the art presentation is always played at night, and the management can change this by having show at noon when audiences have space and time allocations to watch it. Ticket to Surakarta Sriwedari Park can also be integrated with entry ticket to Surakarta Palace. Same method can also be used by both managements of Yogyakarta Sriwedari Park and Yogyakarta Palace. Entry ticket of both places can be integrated during full-up schedule, especially when art presentation is performed on Saturday night.

In *Thai Masked Dance Sala Chalermkrung*, art presentation is opened by Thailand version of leather puppet play and the contest of Thai muscle arts. Main presentation plays *Ramakien* stories, which is Thailand version of Ramayana stories. This presentation is the fruit of creativity of Thai culture, which consists of traditional dance and muscle arts. In Ramayana story presentation, Rama is described as *avatar* (incarnation) of God Vishnu. Holt, in the book titled *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, said that Rama as the incarnation of God Vishnu has been carved on the relief of Candi Prambanan in Central Java [15].

The description of three tourism destinations above shall already clarify everything. Some understandings can be drawn from this description, which respectively is that: (1) presentation space has an important value because it can grow emotional bonding with historical factors; (2) presentation time is an optional and can be used to build exotic sensation. Presentation can be held during the pilgrimage to the historical site to generate sensation of mystical, mythological and spirituality. Cultural aspect has a capacity to support tourism development [1]; and (3) Ramayana tourism performing arts are considered iconic by audiences in Indonesia and Thailand. *Maecenas* (art conservers) play important role in the conservation of tourism performing arts. Their role takes many forms, such as conservator institution (organization), like Roro Jonggrang Foundation and custom organization, or conservator society, like *Kecak Uluwatu Society*, or through royal empathy as King of Thailand did. In this case, King of Thailand makes conservation-related policies such as combining the finances of several tourism destinations and conserving

Khon classic dance. These policies are truly supporting the feasibility of traditional performing arts.

CONCLUSION

The management of tourism performing arts at three tourism destinations in Indonesia and Thailand have been explained in this research. All these three tourism destinations are different in management orientation, presentation space, and presentation time. Historical sites are associated with presentation time. Visitors are managed by travel agents to go to the sites. The management of the sites organizes art presentation in such a way to produce memorable impression among audiences. To actualize such art presentation, *maecenas* (art conservers) play important role as the caring individuals or as the art institutions that can make policies concerning art presentation. Still relevant to this matter, *maecenas* (art conservers) play role as the source of creativity that can determine the viability of performing arts. Also acting as art protectors, it is not surprising if *maecenas* have a great tendency to enforce the goal of conserving traditional performing arts. Within research context, there are three examples of *maecenas* roles. The most prominent is that shown by King Maha Vajiralongkorn when he decide to be very supportive to the management of tourism performing arts in Thailand. Other *maecenas* role is indicated by custom organization represented by *sekaa* who handles the management of tourism performing arts in Uluwatu, Bali. Another *maecenas* role is played by Roro Jonggrang Foundation in taking care of tourism performing arts in Prambanan.

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