

Commodification of Nini Thowong Art in Bantul Regency

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Abstract—This study aimed to analyze the commodification of Nini Thowong art in Bantul regency; Candran hamlet and Grudo hamlet, and analyze the background factors of Nini Thowong commodification. The research was qualitative descriptive with ethnography approach. The methods were observation, interview, documentation and literature study. The study used Karl Marx and George Simmel's on commodification theory. The results showed that the Nini Thowong art in Candran hamlet has been packaged into cultural industry, which is model of cultural commodification as a tourism asset. The performing art has changed in terms of face shape of puppets, dance, ritual, performance time, sesaji (offerings), iringan (accompaniment), and its original function of sacral convert into profane. The factors that drove the commodification of Nini Thowong arts in Candran hamlet divided into two, first, internal factors consisting of the spirit changing and creativity of aesthetic development of Nini Thowong art management, and second, external factor, the tourism industry in Candran hamlet.

Keywords—*commodification, nini thowong art, tourism*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with enormous potential, not only natural beauty but also rich in culture, customs, languages and diverse local wisdom. That diversity became the main destination of foreign tourists for a vacation. One of the diversities for foreign tourists' destination is art; wherein according to Soedarsono [1] art defines as all kinds of beauty created by humans. Another theory of Arnold Hauser in his book "The Sociology of Art", states that art is product of community. In other words, there is no art without community. A particular art may be the property or identity for particular community group without any connotation of special rights, does not like the ownership by government or religion authorities.

In the globalization era, traditional arts confront the global challenges, because globalization is also a kind of penetration of new values that able to produce practical devices. The practical devices based on information, communication and technology; also produce industrialization that always leads to market orientation. Those devices will produce and reproduce the cultural expression as much as possible. And, it will lead to inevitable of mass production, including traditional art.

The globalization era, the traditional artists are challenged to meet the demands of the market, especially on tourism

industry. This background is the reason why the art performance – originally of a traditional art in the beginning, and then packaged into cultural industry, which is the commodification culture model as a tourism asset. For example, the art of Nini Thowong in Bantul Regency, is used as commodity of tourism and present to tourists by changing the form and function of the show. Commodification is an effort to convert something into economic benefits or profit oriented. Commodification is a process of packaging and selling the cultural objects, and variety of people's lifestyles [2].

This phenomenon also makes the original art of Nini Thowong from sacral turned into profane. The goal is to increase the economic value of local communities. The reality, Nini Thowong's original art turned into a commodification of tourism, making the local and foreign tourists interested to watch it. There is changing, where the first, it assessed from the value. And now, the value has turned into commodity due to profit oriented.

Based on the previous background, this research will find out: (1) commodification of Nini Thowong's art and (2) factors of commodification. This research used commodification theory (Karl Marx and George Simmel) which is used to examine the commodification process of Nini Thowong's art. Karl Marx and George Simmel agree that the economic consequences to produce profits will result in the emergence of commodification in various sectors [3]. Commodification is the process of transforming a product from its use into an exchange rate, wherein the value is determined based on market prices [4].

In the globalization era, Nini Thowong arts confront the global challenges, as a result this art is used as a tourism asset. Art that was originally religious and is now a commercial tourism industry. Nini Thowong consists of two words "nini" and "thowong". *Nini* in Javanese means *embah wedok*, "the elderly woman or grandmother" (Poerwadarminta and KBBI, in Sujarno [5]. And, *Thowong* in Javanese is interpreted as empty or vacant or open. In ancient times, *Nini Thowong* played at night - on the full moon. *Nini Thowong* puppets made from coconut shells, straw, bamboo, foam, gloves, that resemble the human shape (Sumardi, 08 November 2017).

Nini Thowong is a game containing animistic elements. Although, it is exotic for some people, but there are some cases that might be believed to Sulist [6]. *Dhayang* / spirit is taken from *pundhen*, which is considered as the pioneer of the area. *Pundhen* are certain haunted places in Central Java and

inhabited by *dhemit* (magic spirits), or *dhayang* manifest into the ruins of a small temple from the Hindu era - but today, only one or two statues, or large banyan trees, old tombs, rather hidden water springs or strange form of natural objects [7]. Then, the spirit of *Nini Thowong* is taken in *pundhen* which has a large tree and consider the place is inhabited by *dhayang* who pioneer of the village.

There are two arts in Bantul regency: in area of Grudo and Candran hamlet. The *Nini Thowong* art in Candran does not keep its traditional; the show does not perform the rituals of spirit in the grave and *Nini Thowong* puppets face does not make of coconut shells but use a mask. The *Nini Thowong* art in Candran has adapted in terms of its performance; the performance of female and male is dancing during the *Nini Thowong* show. In certain time of dancing, the dancers will experience trance. In contrast, *Nini Thowong* art in Grudo hamlet keep its traditional, wherein the spirit taking is performed in the grave. The *Nini Thowong* puppets face made of coconut shells and there are no dancers who follow the puppets motions (interview, Paeran: January 12, 2018).

This study aimed to analyze the commodification of nini thowong art in Bantul regency; candran hamlet and grudo hamlet, and analyze the background factors of nini thowong commodification.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section II presents literature review. Section III describes material & methodology. Section IV presents the obtained results and following by discussion. Finally, Section V concludes this work.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The article entitles of "Commodification of Nini Thowong Art in Bantul Regency." There are previous researches to be references in this study. Results of a dissertation by Wahjono [8], entitled "The Nature and Function of Nini Thowok's Magical Ritual Games for Follower Communities". In the study explained about several variants and versions of Nini Thowok art in several regions starting from the name of the game, time to play, the material for making puppets, instruments, and headdresses. The research finds out that Nini Thowok is a Javanese folklore in the form of an initiation rite, as a magical game, as a shamanistic site in terms of asking for medicine and asking for blessings. In general, this game is held at the brightest time of the month (full moon).

Chan in [9], entitled "The Sinophone roots of Javanese Nini Thowong". The finding shows that the commodification of Nini Thowong art consisted of the function, and the process of taking and calling the spirit performed by Paguyuban Sabdo Budoyo. Endraswara in [10] entitled "Spiritual Art Nini Thowong: Between *Ngelmu Lung*, *Ngelmu Ling*, and *Ngelmu Leng* (towards the Establishment of Cultural Tourism Village)". The results of this study explain the history or origin of Nini Thowong's spiritual arts and explain the existence of Nini Thowong's art as a reminder that humans can later become spirits.

Pratiwi, *et al.* in [11] entitled "Balinese Arts and Culture as Tourism Commodity in Bali Tourism Promotion Videos". The results of this study show that the arts and culture of Bali is packaged as a tourism commodity in a Bali tourism

promotion video that has been published internationally by Bali Tourism Board. The transformation of cultural function as tourist attraction can lead to the loss of originality.

III. MATERIAL & METHODOLOGY

A. Data

The research setting was conducted in Candran hamlet and Grudo hamlet, Bantul regency. Data collection techniques were: (1) observation: visiting and watching the Nini Thowong performances in two hamlets: Candran hamlet and Grudo hamlets, and observing the changing of the art, (2) interviews: collecting information in two hamlets with the authorities, the head of paguyuban / tourism village, puppets make up, guidance of *iringan* (accompaniment), and community (3) documentation: capturing the photo during the show and training of Nini Thowong art, and (4) literature study: collecting books and literature related to the art of Nini Thowong. The data analysis steps of the research were (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data clarification, (4) data presentation, and (5) drawing conclusions.

B. Method

This study used qualitative methods because it intended to describe, interpret and analyze the conditions deeply, without changing the facts. The most important feature of qualitative methods is the meaning of messages, the process, no distance between subject and researcher, and open and scientific [12]. The approach was ethnography, which is data collection activities and conducted systematically about the way of life as well as various social activities and cultural objects of society [13].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

In this sub section, the results of this work are presented.

a) General Insight of Research Site

The Bantul regency located between 1100 12'34'' to 1100 31' 08'' east longitude and between 70 44' 04'' to 80 00'27'' south latitude. Bantul Regency is one of 5 regencies / cities in Yogyakarta Special Region (DIY) province in Java Island. The boundaries of Bantul Regency are divided into 4 regions:

- The northern boundary is Yogyakarta city and Sleman regency.
- The eastern boundary is Gunungkidul Regency.
- The west boundary is Kulonprogo Regency.
- The southern boundary is Indonesian Ocean.

The total area of Bantul Regency is 50,685 Ha, and Bantul Regency consists of 17 districts: Srandakan, Sanden, Kretek, Pundong, Bambanglipuro, Pandak, Bantul, Jetis, Imogiri, Dlingo, Pleret, Piyungan, Banguntapan, Sewon, Kasihan, Pajangan, and Sedayu. District of Imogiri has Nini Thowong art and it has become the asset of tourist attraction. Imogiri located in the southeast of the Capital Regency of Bantul. Imogiri district has area of 5.448.6880 Ha. The boundaries of Imogiri District are (1) north: Jetis and Pleret district, (2) east:

Dlingo District, (3) south: Pundong and Panggang District, and Gunung Kidul Regency and (4) west: Imogiri District. Kebonagung is a village located in Imogiri district, Bantul regency. Kebonagung village is divided into 5 hamlets; Kanten, Mandingan, Kalangan, Tlogo and Jayan which consists of 23 RT (neighborhood Association) and the total population is 4.866 people. Kebonagung village has a tourism sector especially agriculture because this village include to a agriculture-tourism based, then the tourists interested to learn the insight of agriculture. The potential of nature and culture of Kebonagung tourism village is vary and full of insight the local Indonesian culture, among natural potential, culture and society.

Next, pundong district consists of Panjangrejo Village and located at an altitude of 20M above sea level, and in the south of downtown Bantul regency. The Panjangrejo Village Area consists of 75 RT (neighborhood Association) and divided into 16 hamlets. Based on data of Panjangrejo Village, Grudo Hamlet - research site, is located in the northeast of Panjangrejo Village and consisted of 4 RT (neighborhood Association). This hamlet is bordered by several hamlets and villages: Srihardono Village in the east, Ngelembu hamlet in the south, Srihardono village in the north and Jamprit Hamlet in the west. The hamlet has famous art, both foreign and domestic tourists. The art is "Nini Thowong".

b) Commodification of Nini Thowong Art in Candran hamlet

Nini Thowong art is a supernatural art of spirit transfer into the puppets. This art is not just an ordinary game, but it is a ceremony for calling the rain, treatment, *pesugihan* (looking for wealth with spirit/devil assistance) or searching for lost items [14]. Candran Hamlet, Kebonagung Village, Imogiri district, Bantul Regency, has a beautiful area and beautiful scenery. Most of population in Candran hamlet cultivates the rice fields and fields. So, domestic and foreign tourists are interested to visit the village. But the earthquake that occurred in Yogyakarta on 2006 successfully destroyed the entire area of Bantul, including Candran hamlet.

After a few years disappeared, in 2008, Gajah Mada University (UGM), Faculty of Cultural Sciences conducted a survey to explore the potential of art and culture. After discussion between Candran communities and UGM, finally, decided the Candran hamlet as Tourism Village and was inaugurated on 17 November 2008 [15]. After decided as a tourism village, then the Nini Thowong art which is the identity of Bantul regency is made as a commodification of cultural tourism product. This commodification aims as strategy to increase the economic income and attraction for Candran tourism village.

The changing of *Nini Thowong* art which serve as cultural tourism attractions in Candran hamlet has changed the form of performance and function. Wherein, the *Nini Thowong* art which was originally considered as sacred, but then now changed into profane. Similar to Soedarsono [1], the characteristics of performing art in packaged of tourism assets, are: (1) imitation of the original, (2) short or full or miniature form of the original, (3) full of variations, (4) abandoned the sacred, magical and symbolic values, and (5)

cheap. These five characteristics are included in the *Nini Thowong* art in Candran hamlet.

The *Nini Thowong* art are commodified by art and community management because the art has an attraction and uniqueness. In other word, the *Nini Thowong* art has economic value and valuable capital to Candran hamlet community. The impact of the changing is eliminating or disappear the original form and values within the art. Undeniable, however, the strategy has also positive impact as effort of the traditional art preservation from the extinction.

The development of *Nini Thowong* art is seen from the changing of performance. The changing includes of dance motion, music, makeup, fashion, time, and properties. The most noticeable changing of *Nini Thowong* art in Candran hamlet uses dancers to dance with *Nini Thowong* puppets, i.e. two male dancers who use masks and six female dancers. In contrast, there are no dancers in the *Nini Thowong* art in Grudo hamlet, only *Nini Thowong* puppets. In addition, *Nini Thowong* puppets face in Candran hamlet has been replaced using mask, meanwhile in Grudo hamlet keep its traditional, using coconut shell.

In addition, there is changing of performance structure such as the duration of the show from one hour or 1.5 hours decreased to 25 minutes. The other structures, at the beginning, the musical instrument only use Javanese gamelan and clapping, but now, have changing, use Javanese gamelan and mixture of dimples. Also, at the beginning, there is no a trance scene, but now, the performance show with a trance performed by the dancers. By these changes, there might be possibility of disappear the values.

The emergence of various forms of tourism-oriented performing arts is perceived to be more prioritizing on audience satisfaction. The art packaging is evidence of creativity of Candran hamlet community in creating the performing arts as tourism commodity and incorporated into a tourism village of Kebonagung. And, it attracts the tourists to visit the village. The purpose in general is, to provide experiences to tourists and attract tourists with *Nini Thowong* art performance.



Fig. 1. Performances of Nini Thowong in Grudo hamlet



Fig. 2. Performances of Nini Thowong in Candran hamlet

Based on the Figures 1 and 2 about the performance of Nini Thowong art, the emergence of significant change in the function that was previously as sacred art from generation to generation, and today, is transformed into profane art because the traditional art performers have to adapt with audience. The tourism sector has changed the performing arts because tourism as an industry producing products purchased by consumers (tourists) in the form of services and consumer goods [16]. The emergence of various forms of tourism-oriented performing arts perceived to be more prioritizing the audience satisfaction. The society called as secularization. Performing arts created for worldly needs Seramasara in Dewi [17]. Then, no wonder, if an art has already packed into a tourist asset, it will change in terms of performances.

The emergence of the commercial art of Nini Thowong, the symbolic and historical value turned into a commercial show. According to Irianto [18], the existence of traditional arts in current become the part of cultural commercialization. The current economic globalization departs from activities in the tourism economy sector demanding the entertainment in the form of traditional art performances that are appropriate with the tourism attraction. By the commodification of Nini Thowong art, it clearly has a positive impact on the economy to the community and new workspace. On the other hand, the commodification of Nini Thowong art will eliminate the cultural identity, the characteristic of Nini Thowong that should be the identity of Bantul Regency.

The Nini Thowong art has experienced profanization in the form of cultural tourism attractions in Bantul Regency, especially in Candran hamlet. It always relates to economic motive and contaminated with the idea of capitalism that only want to gain benefit as much as possible through the preservation of local culture.

c) *Influence Factor affects to commodification of Nini Thowong Art in Candran Hamet*

The development of Nini Thowong art in Candran hamlet has experienced much commodification process, which in beginning only as sacred performing arts, and recently, turned into entertainment performing arts. There are two factors that affects to commodification of Nini Thowong art. They are:

a. *Internal Factor*

- *The spirit changing in Nini Thowong Art*

The term of changing here is changing of spirit in the traditional of Nini Thowong art. Globalization leads to the spirit of creating unity among groups, creating the harmony of life, rituals, mutual help has dissappear, and changing the spirit to improve the economic prosperity. The transformation of traditional society into modern society impact to the society in experiencng a changing towards a progressive culture that emphasize to culture of materialism. The vaues of religious, magical, and cultural have faded along with the commercial culture. With the spirit to improve the economic, then the traditional arts are commodified as tourism assets.

- *Creativity of development on Aesthetic Art of Nini Thowong*

Art will always relate to art performers or an Artist. Artists are able to create and develop the arts. With the encouragement of the creativity, it can create the Nini Thowong art into a new innovation by changing the form of original show performance. On the other hand, creativity in the modernization era was driven by the spirit of earning money. Market ideology also included as the factors that affects the commodification and change the Nini Thowong art, from sacred into profane, but it also keeps its originality. In recents, the Nini Thowong art packaging is for tourist's consumption.

b. *External Factor*

External factor more relates to supportive environment, which is cuased by the penetration of tourism industry and impact of globalization. This tourism industry needs facilities and infrastructure to support the tourism in order the tourists are interested to visit the Candran tourism village. The determination of Candran tourism village requires the community to present their art potential as creative culture in provide opportunities and affects to economic values. The development of tourism provides two positive and negative impacts toward the culture. The positive impacts are, first, on social culture are the preservation of local cultures such as customs, traditions, traditional arts – the most are in endangered level, second, and can improve the economy of communities and provides new workspaces. In contrast, the negative impacts are the exploitation of the culture for tourism interests and the loss or dissappear of noble values on traditional art itself. But the commodification might not come from internal and creativity, but the commodification arises rather to answer the market need. The product acts as answer of public taste and need, as stated by Sutiyono [19].

The research found the conception Nini Thowong's art packaging in terms of the form of the show which is used as a tourism industry that has commercial value.

V. CONCLUSION

The commodification of Nini Thowong art in Candran hamlet are caused by the demands of the tourism sector. The determination of hamlet as tourism village, converts the art

which was originally sacred turn into profane. Then, the art has economic value. Here, the commodification of Nini Thowong art is also an attempt to meet the consumer demand. The factors that drive the commodification of Nini Thowong art are internal and external factors. The internal factors relates to spirit changing and the development of creativity of art management. And, the external factors are the penetration of tourism sector that led to the commercialization of Nini Thowong art.

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