

## The Concept of Local Genius in Balinese Performing Arts

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Local genius refers to what humans know, how they behave and what strategies they develop to sustain their existence where they live. The knowledge they have, the way in which they behave and the strategies they develop to sustain themselves imply the local genius of the area where they live. One of the local geniuses in Bali is the socio-ecological and spiritual principle referred to as *tri hita karana*. It is considered a dimension of balance in Balinese culture. It is deemed local genius which regulates the balanced relation between man and his God, between man and his fellow-beings, and between man and his environment. In Bali, layout and culture cannot be separated. Every space occupied by Bali Hindus has been designed in such a way that nothing deviates from the system of values the Balinese culture has. Another example is the concept of *tri mandala*, another local genius which is referred to when a temple is constructed. In addition to having religious function, a temple also has aesthetic function which is highly related to the performing arts performed. It has indirectly caused the creation and performance of the Balinese performing arts to be divided into three. They are the performing arts which are created and performed in the inner or main part of the temple (*dalem*); the performing arts which are created and performed in the 'madia' (middle) part of the temple (*jaba tengah*); and those which are created and performed in the 'nista' (outer) part of the temple (*jaba sisi*). Apart from the concept of *tri mandala*, there is also another concept referred to as *tri angga*, the aesthetic concept of how the structure of a Balinese traditional performing art should be created. It is made up of the head (*pepeson* or *pengawit*), the initial part; the body (*pengawak*), the main part; and the feet (*pengecet* and *pekaad*), the final part. The concept of *tri angga*, as a local genius, has been organized in such a way that it does not deviate from the system of values the Balinese culture has. The performing arts in Bali cannot be separated from the Balinese culture; in other words, the performing arts are an integral part of the Balinese culture. Therefore, every performing art in Bali always has its performing structure organized by referring to the concept of *tri angga*, a local genius referred to by a choreographer when creating a Balinese performing art.

Keywords: Concept of local genius and balinese performing arts.

Essentially, culture refers to a set of human knowledge as a response to the condition of the environment where humans live. Such experience is generally acquired from what they have repeatedly undergone and will be bequeathed from generation to generation. They will do their best to be responsive to the form and condition of the environment where they live in order to sustain their existence.

The knowledge they have, the way in which they behave and the strategy they develop to overcome the obstructions resulting from the nature and environment where they live is what is termed as *local genius* (Bagus, 2003). To keep the relation between man and his God, the relation between man

and his fellow-beings and the relation between man and his environment balanced, the socio-ecological and spiritual principle available in the Balinese culture, which is termed as *tri hita karana*, one of the Balinese local geniuses, should be used as the reference. Apart from that, there is also a concept of *tri kaya parisuda*, another local genius which forms personality. It teaches that everybody should think, speak and behave positively. It is highly related to the concept of *mulat sarira* (introspection).

Talking about *local genius* basically means talking about identity and cultural sustainability; how people from an ethnic group maintain their cultural identity from being globally influenced by such a

sophisticated communication system. Talking about arts basically means talking about aesthetics related to the philosophy of beauty with its wide subject (Gie, 1976).

As far as this context is concerned, aesthetics, in the story of human thought, covers two matters; they are (a) the theory of beauty (what beauty is?); (b) the theory of arts (what arts are) (Sutrisno, 1999: 105). To correlate the two theories, explanation is needed in order to be able to understand 'whether the aesthetic conception of the performing arts in Bali is a local genius. Aesthetics in this article gives more emphasis on the meaning of the action done by humans to create artistic objects, exactly, the Balinese performing arts.

Various articles on local geniuses published in Indonesian language have referred to the work written by H.G. Quaritch Wales (1948) entitled 'Cultural Change in Greater India' (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society), in which the characteristics of a nation are discussed when it makes cultural contact with another culture. As far as this context is concerned, the entire characteristics Indonesia had in the past when it made cultural contact with India. However, the aesthetic creation tends not to have been claimed as the subject of aesthetic philosophy since determined as the object of the study in creative process and sub-psychology of the art performing creator.

According to Sulistiyawati (2000), a local genius refers to the ability to sustain from being influenced by external culture, to accommodate the external cultural elements and to integrate them into the indigenous culture, to direct the cultural development, to be cumulatively supervised, to be evolutionarily formed, not to be eternal, to decrease in size, and not to be clearly physically visible. According to Noerhadi (1986: 57), a local genius refers to the ability to learn, understand and then re-manage and formulate it as a new concept. In this study, a local genius refers to the ability of the Balinese culture to face the influence given by foreign culture when they touch each other.

In relation to that, Edi Sedyawati (in Ayatrohaedi, 1986: 187) states that, in performing arts, a local genius refers to two definitions; they are (a) all the values, concepts and technologies already

possessed by one nation before being influenced by foreign culture; and (b) the absorbing, interpreting, modifying and creating ability of a country before being influenced by foreign culture.

As far as the context of the development of performing arts is concerned, the first definition plays a highly important role to restrict what is meant by definition two. Then a question appears 'Is there any local genius in the Balinese performing arts?' If there is, how to identify it? Is such a local genius an aesthetic concept or an expressive strength? The answers to these questions will be described below as an attempt to find out, on one hand, how beauty is absorbed in the structure of the performing arts, and how the aesthetic concept is described in the performing arts, on the other.

How the aesthetic concept is described highly depends on the object selected, namely, the traditional performing arts in Bali. The problems are formulated as follows: whether, during the creation process of the performing arts, the choreographer refers to a particular aesthetic conception which may be claimed as a local genius as defined by Sedyawati above? If he/she does, what is the name of such a concept and how it is implemented in the performing arts he/she creates?

#### **THE CONCEPT OF LOCAL GENIUS IN THE BALINESE PERFORMING ARTS**

In the Balinese traditional performing arts, cultural values are so strongly united that they cannot be separated from each other. Performing arts are stated to be related to skills; furthermore, it is also stated that performing arts should be continuously performed as part of human activities (Bandem, 1996: 33). The purified and profane characteristics still influence the performing arts in Bali. As some illustrations, there is an orientation toward the north (*kaja*) and an orientation toward the south (*kelod*); there is a belief that God Siva controls some of the universe (*siwaloka*); there is a belief that the front part (*luwanan*) is holier than the back part (*tebenan*); and there is an attitude of treating the mount and the sea as the horrifying parts of the earth as the strong basis for developing sacred and secular performing arts in Bali. This is reflected by the performing arts performed in the temple in Bali which are highly related to the concept of *tri mandala*; the layout



created based on the nature of being sacred and the nature of being profane. The layout and the types of performing arts performed in the temple clearly reflect that the more sacred the space is the more sacred the performing arts performed will be.

- a). The *tari wali*, the dances which have sacred values, are performed in the inner/main part (*dalem*). They are performed in the main part, the most sacred compared to the other lower parts. The holy ritual ceremonies are centered in this part. Religious atmosphere is highly felt as the dances such as *rejang* and *baris gede* and several other dances are also performed at the same time.
- b). The central part 'madya' (*jaba tengah*), is the part connecting the main part and the outer part 'nista'. It is called the central part as it is located in the center of the temple. Those who take part in the ritual ceremonies performed in the inner part should change their behavior, from being worldly into being religious. The other types of dances performed in the inner part is what is called 'gambuh' (the Balinese dance drama which is classical, highly valuable and so rich in dancing moves that it is considered the source of every type of the classical Balinese dances), and the mask dance 'tari topeng' (another type of the Balinese dance drama, in which all the dancers wear masks) and the stories referred to are the historical ones termed as 'Babad'.
- c). The outer part 'nista, jaba sisi' is the one in which those who take part in the ritual ceremonies may enjoy their worldly desires; they may gamble, drink and eat and enjoy any amusement entertaining them. The dances which are performed to amuse people are called 'balih-balihan', the profane dances which are usually performed in the outer part. One of such dances is what is called 'tari joged' (a social dance). It is performed with free moves and improvisations by a pair of male and female dancers.

In general, the Balinese people are familiar with the concepts of *luan* ('ulu' the upper part) and *teben* ('hilir' the lower part). In connection with such a division of space, the shrine '*pelinggih*' (a construction where Gods are believed to reside), has the same structure as a human body called *tri angga*, namely, the head, the body and the feet. Such three parts are spatially arranged and have standard

measures (which cannot be changed). The concepts created by the Balinese people refer to the natural elements which are used as the framework in the logic of symbolic classifications such as the sunset which is opposed to the sunrise and the mount which is opposed to the sea (Arsana et al, 1992). As far as the concepts inspiring the cultural consciousness of any form or structure which is symbolically classified are concerned, the human body is used as the reference as reflected in the performing arts, in the housing structure, in the shrine (*pelinggih*) and so forth.

In Bali, there are several local geniuses which are related to various aspects of culture such as *subak*, the local genius which is related to the irrigation system; *karma pala*, the local genius which is related to the system of belief within the context of honesty; *trimandala*, the local genius which regulates the layout of a temple; *desa kala patra*, the local genius which is related to space, time and situation; *tri angga*, the local genius which regulates structure of something; and many others which are still maintained by the Balinese people. The problem which is discussed in this study is the *tri angga* local genius referred to in the Balinese traditional performing arts.

Before answering the questions above, it is necessary to discuss the way in which the local genius referred to in the performing arts is measured. According to Edi Sedyawati, the local genius can be measured by the originality and the strength of the expressions any art work has (in Ayatrohjaedi, 1986: 187). The two indicators can be felt and explained from the beginning to the end; in other words, from the quality attached to the art work. However, the aesthetic conception adhered to by the creator and referred to during its process of creation is necessarily taken into account in order to understand the quality of the art work. The understanding of the conception inspiring the art work can support the critical understanding of the aesthetical quality of the art work.

Edi Sedyawati recognizes that it is difficult to measure the local genius any art work contains; however, it is easier to identify whether it contains any local genius or not by using particular indicators through the following steps: a) the elements it contains are reviewed; b) the quality it has is reviewed; and

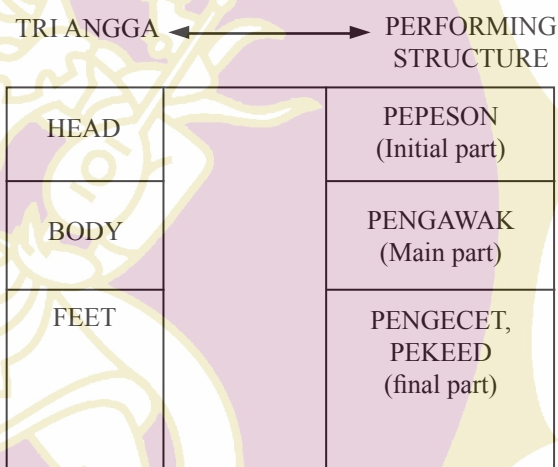
c) the function it has is renewed. According to Edi Sedyawati, while the elements, the quality and function the art work has are reflected from the values attached to it, the local genius referred to as the aesthetic conception of the creation, as what is discussed in this study, inspires the performing art. The aesthetic conception inspiring the structure of the Balinese performing arts is the local genius ‘*tri angga*’, which is made up of the head (*pepeson* or *pengawit*), the body (*pengawak*), and the feet (*pengecet* and *pekaad*).

The Balinese performing arts which are performed for economic purposes termed as “touristic performing arts” are categorized as the modern Balinese cultural product (Picard, 1990: Dibia, 1997). Such touristic performing arts have developed since foreign tourists came to Bali in 1930s (Piet, 1993: 76). Although they have adopted many foreign cultural elements as can be seen from how the costumes worn are designed, how lightning and the stage on which they are performed are organized, the dancing moves by which they are performed, and so forth, it seems that the choreographer still refers to the local genius *tri angga*.

The development of Bali tourism which is culture-oriented has made it termed as Cultural Tourism. The decision made by the Bali Government to have the tourism sector as an industry has enriched the Balinese culture in general and its performing arts in particular. Tourism has encouraged artists to become involved in and to enjoy the facilities and contribution resulting from the development of the tourism industry in Bali.

From various structures of the Balinese performing arts performed for ritual purposes and economic purposes (tourism), it is observed that the local genius *tri angga* is still maintained. It is reflected from every structure of the performing arts performed. The choreographer organizes it in three parts similar to the parts of the human body; the initial part (*pepeson*) which is identical with the head, the main part (*pengawak*) which is identical with the body containing the characters, and the final part (*pekaad*) which is identical with the feet. The concept referred to by the structure of the performing arts is already standard as the structure of the human body, as far as how the parts are structured and the extent to which each is performed.

The concept of the local genius *tri angga* can also be observed from the performing works done by the students of ISI (the Arts Institute of Indonesia) as their final assignments. In relation to this, they have adopted many external cultural elements such as how the lighting is arranged, how the costumes worn are designed, how the dancing moves are performed, how the sound system is organized, and so forth; however, how their performing arts are structured still maintain the traditional performing art structure, namely, *tri angga*, the Balinese people’s local genius, as described below.



**Diagram 1.** The concept of *Tri Angga* in the Balinese Performing Arts

Structure is one of the manifestations of the cultural consciousness which is highly influenced by the elementary logical principles. Such principles are explained through the cosmos conception which is symbolically classified. The macro cosmos dimension is also referred to in the Javanese conception as described by Parsudi (1977). Similarly, the Balinese people also describe the universe as a container with unchangeable and clear boundaries. As a container, the universe is conceived of having sides, namely, the elements which are made up of various visible and invisible forms, each of which is independent and functions independently and influences each other.

**CONCLUSIONS**

*Tri hita karana* is a dimension of balance which is derived from the Balinese culture. It is also deemed a local genius regulating the balanced



relations between man and his God, between man and his fellow-beings, and between man and his environment. The Balinese layout and culture cannot be separated. Each space in the environment where the Balinese people live is regulated in such a way that it does not deviate from the system of values the Balinese culture has. The local genius *tri mandala* reflected in the temple spatial division functions religiously and aesthetically; this can also be seen from the performing arts performed. The concept of *tri mandala*, as a local genius, indirectly divides the performing arts created and performed into three: the performing arts created to be performed in the inner part '*utama*' (*dalem*); the performing arts created to be performed in the central part '*madia*' (*jaba tengah* 'central part'); and the ones created to be performed as entertainments '*balih-balihan*' in the outer part '*nista*' (*jaba sisi*).

The performing arts in Bali refer to the concept of *tri mandala* as well as the concept of *tri angga*. The letter is so well organized that it will never deviate from the system of values the Balinese culture has. The performing arts and the Balinese culture cannot be separated from one another. Every form of the performing arts are structured with reference to the local genius *tri angga* which has been so well organized so that they always refer to the system of values the Balinese culture has. The concept of *tri angga* referred to by the structure of the traditional Balinese performing arts functions aesthetically and cannot be separated from the performing arts performed. This means that the local genius '*tri mandala*' indirectly divides the performing arts created and performed into three parts: the performing arts created to be performed in the inner part '*utama*' (*dalem*); the performing arts created to be performed in the central part '*madia*' (*jaba tengah*) and such performing arts are termed as *bebali/bali*; and those created to be performed as entertainments (*balih-balihan*) in the outer part '*nista*' (*jaba sisi*).

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