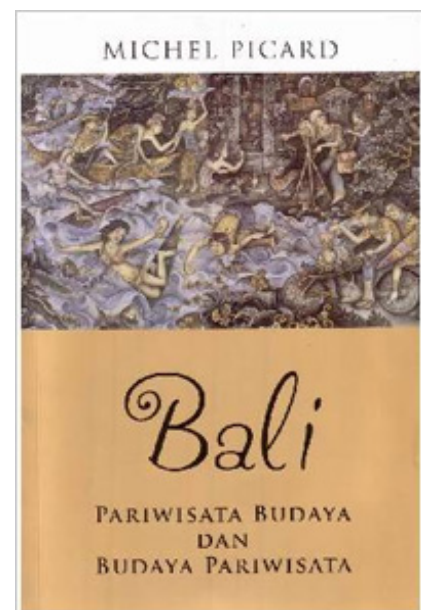


Bali: the development of international tourism and the fostering of the national culture.

Par Michel Picard. Le 8 April 2010



Once Cultural Tourism became the official tourism doctrine of Indonesia, the Balinese infatuation with this formula seems to have become more tempered. Since the 1970s, studies of the sociocultural impact of tourism and seminars on the relationship between tourism and culture are rarer. Not that interest in tourism has dropped — to the contrary — but it has become an integral part of the Balinese cultural landscape[1]. And while Cultural Tourism remains the inescapable point of reference — that which characterizes Bali as a tourist destination — the term itself has become somewhat reduced: it has become abridged, and it has lost the capital letters that previously exalted it. The formula has served its purpose and become banal, and now it is one product among many in the gamut of Balinese tourism. For tourism in Bali is seeking to diversify its production, and these days one hears not only of “cultural tourism” (*wisata budaya*), but also “nature tourism” (*wisata alam*), “marine tourism” (*wisata bahari*), “forest tourism” (*wisata rimba*), “village tourism” (*wisata desa*), “agricultural tourism” (*wisata pertanian*), “sports tourism” (*wisata*

olahraga), “convention tourism” (*wisata konvensi*), “spiritual tourism” (*wisata spiritual*) and — but only to deplore it — “sex tourism” (*wisata seks*). In short, Cultural Tourism has become just one item among many.

Parallel with this change in the import of Cultural Tourism, one may observe a shift in the order of concerns. The question that occupies the Balinese these days seems to be, rather than assessing the impact of tourism on their culture, how to exploit their culture in the most profitable way. This is what is suggested by the one seminar of any importance on tourism held during the 1980s: whereas the earlier seminars were aimed at “fostering culture and developing tourism”, the 1987 seminar organized by the provincial government addressed only “the fostering and development of tourism” (Pemda Bali, 1987). And the only paper dealing with the culture, presented by the Head of the Regional Office of Culture, was devoted mainly to defining what Balinese culture should be to contribute efficiently to the development of tourism.

In the face of such a statement, it is very tempting to conclude that, between the “Seminar on Cultural Tourism” of 1971 and the “Commission of Cooperation for Fostering and Developing Cultural Tourism” in 1979, the Balinese authorities had capitulated and sacrificed their concern for the fostering of culture to the demands of developing tourism; that it is no longer a matter of protecting the Balinese from the corrupting contact with tourists, but of enrolling them in the tourist promotion of their island; that the problem is no longer to circumscribe the domain conceded to tourism, but to capitalize on every possible asset to enhance the Balinese tourist product. Nonetheless, I do not believe that things are as simple as that, and I am inclined to think that the radical change in the attitude of the Balinese authorities in regard to tourism is but the outcome of a logic set in motion from the time of the very conception of Cultural Tourism.

By the beginning of the 1980s, tourism clearly no longer frightened the Balinese. The best proof of this lies in the shift of meaning attributed to the notion of “touristic culture”, which underwent an evolution symmetrical with that of “cultural tourism” — not only becoming trivial in its abridgment, but in fact becoming the object of a tacit rehabilitation. Instead of being held up as a threat, describing the peril from which Balinese culture must at all costs save itself, it is presently used in the media to designate a state of mind appropriate to tourism, and defines a culture that has been able to adapt itself to tourists and their demands. In short, in becoming banal it has become respectable — to the point even that the syntagms “cultural tourism” (*wisata budaya*) and “touristic culture” (*budaya wisata*) are employed today in conjunction rather than opposition.

Moreover, the fears initially aroused by the advent of tourists have given way to expressions of undisguised satisfaction. There has been a spectacular reversal in regard to the imputed effects of tourism. Accused not long ago of being a vehicle of “cultural pollution”, tourism is now considered by the Balinese authorities to be a factor of “cultural renaissance” (*renaissance kultural*). As to the justification for this buoyant reappraisal, it is exactly the same argument already advanced by McKean: the tourist money stimulated the interest of the Balinese for their cultural traditions, and the admiration of visitors for their culture reinforced their sense of identity and their pride in being Balinese. This is also a point made by a growing number of foreign observers, manifestly reassured to find that their initial fears have proven unfounded:

“If anything, tourism has pumped more life into the Balinese cultural Renaissance that began earlier this century. Although the vast majority of wood carvings, paintings and “antiques” passed off on visitors is strictly mass-produced souvenir stuff, there are probably more superb artists and craftsmen in Bali today than at any time in its history. With the infusion of dollars from tourist

performances, village dance companies have been able to afford new costumes that inspire continued pride in their art” (Zach 1986: 9)[2].

This argument became the official word in Bali when it was upheld by the new Governor of the province, appointed in 1978 by President Suharto and replacing the Javanese colonel imposed on the Balinese eleven years earlier to bring the island back under control after the bloodshed that marked the fall of the Sukarno regime. The new Governor was wreathed with all the credentials one could wish for to establish his authority — among the Balinese as well as vis-à-vis Jakarta. First and foremost, he was Balinese, and a Brahmana besides, who held a doctoral degree from a prestigious university in India, and was known as an expert in matters of religion and culture. After having been one of the founders of the Parisada Hindu Dharma, he was named Rector of the University of Bali and then Director General of Culture in Jakarta; and he was said to be a protégé of President Suharto. His accession, moreover, was consecrated by the celebration in 1979 of the solemn ritual purification Eka Dasa Rudra at the temple of Besakih — in the presence of the President of the Republic, foreign television crews and thousands of tourists — which, unlike its tragic precedent in 1963, was carried out successfully, attesting to the legitimacy acquired by the Balinese religion in the Indonesian nation (Stuart-Fox 1982). For the Balinese, anxious about the expanding Javanese influence on their territory, the appointment of a Balinese governor was perceived as a sign of both national reconciliation and the legitimization of Balinese identity on the part of the central government. The hitherto perceptible anxiety gave way to serenity, and the defensive attitude of the Balinese authorities became jubilant.

Thus, to judge by the declarations of the Balinese authorities, one could surmise that Cultural Tourism — after going through an initial period of adjustment when the onslaught of foreigners on the island raised legitimate fears — had successfully accomplished its mission. However, before congratulating the Balinese, we should look carefully at the arguments presented to us as proof of the “renaissance” of their culture — for upon examination, it turns out that under the guise of a cultural renaissance, what we are seeing is the joint process of the touristification and the Indonesianization of Balinese culture. I will show first what happens to the Balinese culture when it is called on to contribute both to the development of international tourism in Indonesia and to the building of the national Indonesian culture. And then we shall see how, under the constraint of this double imperative, the Balinese have come to search for their cultural identity in the image that the tourists and the Indonesians hold of them.

From the denunciation of “cultural pollution” to the proclamation of a “cultural renaissance”, what is signified by the term “Balinese culture” has undergone a revealing change[3]. What had been above all a matter of “cultural values” (*nilai budaya*) is today primarily a matter of what the Indonesian language designates as *seni budaya*, which may be translated as “cultural arts”[4].

When tourism was accused of corrupting Balinese culture, the issues were the desacralization of the temples and the profanation of religious ceremonies, the monetarization of social relations and the weakening of community ties, or the relaxing of moral standards and the rise of mercantile attitudes. These days, whether they are worrying about the commoditization of their culture or rejoicing in the creativity of their artists, the Balinese authorities seem to be concerned above all about what is likely to be shown and sold to tourists. The “culture” in question is not to be thought of in the anthropological sense of a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”, to cite the canonical definition proposed by E. B. Tylor. Its sense here is restricted to only those aspects that may be made the object of a representation and give rise to an aesthetic appreciation — that is,

to artistic expressions. And it is to this that the Balinese refer when they speak of a “cultural renaissance”, as in the slogan concocted by the Directorate General of Tourism: “Tourism Ensures the Conservation of the Cultural Arts of the Nation” (*Kepariwisata Melestarikan Seni Budaya Bangsa*).

Culture as art.

This conception of culture as art is clearly illustrated by the “Bali Arts Festival” (*Pesta Kesenian Bali*), one of the first initiatives taken by the new Governor. Launched in 1979 at the Art Center (*Werdi Budaya*) in Denpasar — another creation of the Governor, when he was still the Director General of Culture — this annual event is the official proof of Bali’s cultural renaissance. According to the booklet published by the Bali Government Tourism Office presenting both the Art Center and the Arts Festival:

“A popular misconception is that Balinese Dance and Drama has lost much of its lustre: that gamelans are rusting in their pavilions and dancers leaving the stage for a life on the juice blender. The truth is that Bali is undergoing a cultural renaissance with bigger and brighter temple festivals, revived art forms and more orchestras than ever before” (Wijaya, Pemayun & Raka 1981: 1).

The Arts Festival provides a perfect example of what Cultural Tourism is meant to be, in that it was created by the Governor as a means of fostering Balinese culture while contributing to the development of tourism on the island. Among the slogans calling on the Balinese to participate in the Festival, one notes in particular: “With the Bali Arts Festival We Develop Cultural Tourism” (*Melalui Pesta Kesenian Bali Kita Tingkatkan Pariwisata Budaya*). It would be a mistake, however, to see this event as an attraction intended for tourists, if only because its public is mainly Balinese[5]. Widely covered by the regional and national media, the Arts Festival is a gigantic cultural event on an island-wide scale which presents, in a manner at once magnified and sublimated, “Balinese culture” in its official version. The Bali Arts Festival was in effect ratified in 1986 by the issuing of a regional regulation; and the following year it even received the stamp of approval of the President of the Republic, who personally came to inaugurate the Festival. Since then, several other provinces have begun holding their own Arts Festivals, modeled on the precedent created by the Balinese.

What comprises the Bali Arts Festival? Mainly parades, exhibitions, performances, contests, and literary soirées (Pangdjaja 1991a). The best-attended events are the performances, among which one may find theatrical genres that have become rare and which the Festival sets itself the mission of preserving and revitalizing; local specialties unknown outside their region of origin, with the idea of presenting them to the public of Denpasar; and finally, grand productions of *Sendratari*, generally based on the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, performed in the open air theater of the Art Center, said to be able to accommodate 7,000 spectators. These super-productions are indisputably the highlight of the Festival. From the very beginning they have been the events that benefit from the biggest budget, that have the most intense rehearsals and the most sophisticated staging, and above all that draw by far the greatest crowds, Balinese and visitors together. And it is always a *Sendratari* that celebrates the opening of the Festival and its closing.

It is striking that the Bali Arts Festival gives the place of honor to a performance imported in the 1960’s from Java, where it was intended to be a tourist entertainment. As we have seen, for *Sendratari* to be understood and appreciated by foreign audiences, this new theatrical form

departed considerably from the principles of composition traditionally found in Balinese theater[6]. Nonetheless, the Festival consecrated one of the most famous tourist performances, the *Sendratari Ramayana* (better known as the Ramayana Ballet) as an “authentic Balinese tradition” (*tradisi Bali yang asli*). And its success, renewed year after year, is supposed to testify to the island’s artistic vitality, to the point that the president of the organizing committee could declare, in the second year of the Festival, that:

“its priority objective is in the development of traditional Balinese art under the form of a presentation of the *Sendratari Ramayana*”[7].

The up-grading of the *Sendratari* to an authentic Balinese tradition seems to be well-established today, judging from the paper presented by the Head of the Academy of Indonesian Dance in the course of a “Seminar on the Contribution of Balinese Cultural Values to the Development of the National Culture” (*Seminar Sumbangan Nilai Budaya Bali dalam Pembangunan Kebudayaan Nasional*), held in 1984 in Denpasar. The author in effect recommends popularizing *Sendratari* more widely in the villages, as the theatrical genre “most apt to assure the conservation of Balinese cultural values” (Bandem 1986: 55).

One may marvel that after less than 20 years of existence, the *Sendratari*, originally created for a non-Balinese audience, has been officially recognized as the vehicle par excellence of Balinese cultural values. Having become so, however, it is not surprising to read, in an Indonesian study on the pernicious effects of the commercialization of Balinese culture by tourism, that:

“the integrity of the *Sendratari Ramayana* is endangered by its presentation to tourists” (Yoeti 1985: 14)[8].

The truth is that, rather than a tourist performance, the *Sendratari* is a composite genre whose vocation is pan-Indonesian, in the sense that it was created in such a way as to permit a communication among the various ethnic groups of the archipelago. Indeed, besides *Sendratari* “in the style of Bali” (*gaya Bali*), there flourish *Sendratari* in the style of Sunda, of Surakarta, of Yogyakarta and still others. But while the *Sendratari* performances composed for the Bali Arts Festival must be “typical” (*khas*) of the Balinese style, they must remain accessible to all Indonesians, and so they include a mix of styles originating from different regions. The result is that what distinguishes the Balinese *Sendratari* from other forms of *Sendratari* is the dosage among the elements borrowed from various regional traditions. The different styles of *Sendratari* are therefore regional variations on a national theme. This is essentially what is proclaimed in a slogan frequently posted during the Festival: “The Development of Regional Arts Assures the Conservation of the National Culture” (*Pengembangan Kesenian Daerah Merupakan Pelestarian Kebudayaan Nasional*).

As a general rule, the *Sendratari* performances presented at the Festival are composed by the teachers and students of the High School of Traditional Indonesian Music and the College of Indonesian Arts. To a large extent, these institutions, which are under the jurisdiction the Department of Education and Culture, have taken on the role of patronage previously held by the princely courts: the creation of styles and the establishment of standards of execution; the training of dancers and musicians; and the organization and financing of performances. There is a difference, however, and it is an important one. Unlike the princes, who were ever anxious to maintain their own particular styles to distinguish themselves from their neighbors, the Indonesian state through its provincial agencies deliberately strives for decontextualization, centralization and

the regulated standardization of the Balinese arts (Hough 1992). Such institutionalization of the arts goes hand-in-hand with their professionalization, as witnessed by the following statement by the Head of the College of Indonesian Arts:

“The motivations for the performing arts, so far, have been religious ones. But now, we cannot isolate ourselves from globalization any more... We have to live with overseas and domestic tourists. Therefore, now is the time for our artists to conduct themselves like professionals” (Bandem 1991: 24).

This goes for the plastic arts as well as the performing arts, and more generally for all forms of artistic expression cultivated by the Festival; and since they are under the aegis of the Department of Education and Culture, it would be no exaggeration to say that the “Balinese culture” celebrated by the Bali Arts Festival is what the ministry concerned decides it should be.

In this regard, it is significant that in Indonesia, culture is administered in tandem with education. The Indonesian term that is habitually translated as “culture”, *kebudayaan*, is an abstract derivative formed from the root *budaya*, which primarily designates a “cultivated individual” in the sense of someone who has received a good education. As to *kebudayaan*, its contemporary meaning is at once normative and evolutionist, in that it refers to the process by which the ethnic groups of the archipelago are expected to acquire the qualities judged necessary to instate order and civilization according to the ideals of the developing Indonesian nation. It is in vain that one searches therein for the idea of a cultural specificity proper to each ethnic group and, a fortiori, of a cultural relativism (Pelras 1977: 64-66).

Balinese culture as a regional culture.

In these conditions, if the culture presented at the Arts Festival can be called Balinese, it is in the sense that “Balinese culture” (*kebudayaan Bali*) is seen as one of the “regional cultures” (*kebudayaan daerah*) that compose Indonesia. Unlike Sukarno, who wanted to forge a new man and an Indonesian identity by eliminating the “feudalism” and “ethnocentricity” left by the colonial period, the New Order founded by Suharto, while launching a policy of economic development and modernization, undertook to create a national culture based on regional cultural traditions — foremost among them, the Javanese culture.

As in most previously colonized countries, the Indonesian state faced problems of national integration. For Indonesia, these problems were particularly acute given the centrifugal forces at work: it is an archipelago, fragmented in a chain of islands spanning an immense territory, and populated by some three hundred ethnic groups whose language, religion and customs differ markedly. Long held in check by regional interests, the authority of the state was finally able to impose itself, and national unity became an indisputable reality with the establishment of the New Order (Drake 1989).

During the 1970s, as the financial resources of the state increased, the central government’s control over the regions tightened considerably, making them more and more dependent on subsidies from Jakarta. But at the same time, the realization of development plans made it necessary to delegate partial authority to the regions and to call on the participation of local communities. Acknowledging these requirements, the 1974 Regional Government Law granted the provinces limited autonomy in the framework of a heavier control by the state. This reform was completed by

the 1979 Village Government Law, which ended the diversity of local situations by imposing uniform local administrative structures across Indonesia, with the objective of transforming village administration into an arm of the central bureaucracy (Warren 1990).

Thus from the 1980s the peripheral regions found themselves incorporated into the web of the state apparatus. This includes the civil and military authorities, trade and communications networks, urbanization programs, the education system, the national language and the national ideology (*Pancasila*) — not to mention the imposition of the officially recognized monotheistic religions in order to eradicate “animist” attitudes deemed harmful to national development. Once the unity of the nation was considered established, the accent could be put on the country’s diversity, as in the national motto “Unity in Diversity” (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) engraved on the Indonesian coat of arms — a slogan that appears as well on the pamphlets of the Directorate General of Tourism, vaunting Indonesia as “A Destination of Endless Diversity”.

As a matter of fact, ethnicity has become the fashion in Jakarta, to the extent that the media now talk of an “ethnic revival”. There have been numerous exhibitions on the arts and crafts of the outer islands, accompanied by the publication of glossy coffee-table books. Traditional textiles provide a constantly renewed source of inspiration in Indonesian haute couture and interior design, while the new international airport proudly exhibits a variety of decorative patterns borrowed from the country’s diverse ethnic groups. Ethnic handicrafts are sold as souvenirs to tourists — both domestic and foreign — in addition to being exported abroad. Dance troupes from the provinces are invited to perform in the capital city, and the national television offers regular regional cultural shows. In short, Indonesia appears to be going ethnic.

Some authors have lent academic validity to this “ethnic revival”, by asserting that cultural mobilization based on ethnic identity might be used by the state to prevent mobilization based on class interests (Magenda 1988). And indeed, as economic development propelled Indonesian society into the modern world, it also threatened the social and moral stability of populations whose environments had been disturbed. In this context, the focus on ethnic identity can be interpreted as an attempt to re-establish a sense of continuity with an idealized past in response to urbanization, social differentiation, and the Westernization of life styles. If there is undoubtedly some truth in this statement, it is far from telling the whole story. The point is that, rather than denying the appeal of ethnicity as a focus of allegiance and identity by suppressing its manifestations, the New Order has resorted to the more cunning strategy of disempowerment and incorporation. In short, not only have ethnic identities been domesticated by the state, but they are being enlisted to contribute to the process of nation-building.

Now, while the expression of ethnic identity appears to have found official sanction, it is only as long as it remains at the level of cultural display — and even then, the kinds of cultural differences which can be displayed are strictly defined by the state. Thus, the visual and decorative aspects of Indonesian ethnic cultures have benefited from an unprecedented degree of official promotion. Needless to say, this showcase vision does not acknowledge that which forms the core of a culture — such as language, religion, legal system, economic practices, social organization, and so on — and contributes to sustaining the sense of identity of the participants in that culture. On the contrary, the destruction of traditional economic patterns, plundering of the environment and depreciation of local knowledge that ensue from the policy of national development are conducive to the deculturation of religion and the erosion of the ritual function of the arts (Dove 1988; Foulcher 1990). In Indonesia, there is no room whatsoever for diversity which asserts competing economic and political interests of different ethnic groups. In this respect, the New Order state is

proceeding just as the colonial state before it had proceeded in order to prevent ethnic differences from taking on political force: that is, by “culturalizing” the expression of ethnic identity as far as possible.

But even this is only one side of the story. In truth, we are not really dealing with what appears as a strictly controlled and sanitized version of Indonesia’s “ethnic cultures”, but rather with what is called by Indonesian officials “regional cultures” (*kebudayaan daerah*). These regional cultures are expected to make a “contribution” (*sumbangan*) to the building of the “national culture” (*kebudayaan nasional*). As such, they are considered depositories of potential “resources” (*sumber*) that can provide “cultural elements” (*unsur-unsur kebudayaan*) to the Indonesian culture (Soebadio 1985).

This conception of Indonesian culture is actively promoted by the state, whether in the schools, where children learn to identify the explicitly acknowledged ethnic groups according to certain markers officially enlisted to characterize them (such as houses, costumes, dances, etc.), or in the cultural programs transmitted by television, where these same groups exhibit the duly approved traits of their ethnic identity. And this conception is staged most eloquently in the “Beautiful Indonesia-in-Miniature Park” (*Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*), a sort of Art Center on the scale of Indonesia — inspired by Mrs. Suharto after a trip to Disneyland — built in the outskirts of Jakarta in 1975 (Pemberton 1994). Although the reason invoked at the time to justify this extravagant project was the importance of presenting a valorizing image of Indonesia’s cultural diversity to foreign tourists, observation shows that the visitors to *Taman Mini* are by an immense majority Indonesians. They are invited to recognize themselves in a conception of “Indonesianity” (*Keindonesiaan*) iconically signified by the juxtaposition of markers of the ethnic groups comprising the Indonesian nation. But only certain groups are represented there, and those that are, under the aegis of the province to which they belong. Each of the 27 provinces of Indonesia is represented by a “traditional house” (*rumah adat*) in which there are exhibits of “traditional costumes” (*pakaian adat*) as well as demonstrations of “traditional dances” (*tarian adat*)[9]. And so it is that with the creation of a provincial *adat*, the sphere of “tradition” becomes an administrative category. The focus of identity is displaced from the ethnic group to the province, which could be seen as an attempt to substitute ethnic cultural identities with a provincial cultural identity.

Bearing this in mind, it becomes clear that “Balinese culture” should not be identified with what an ethnographic investigation would define as being the culture of the Balinese in that they constitute an “ethnic group” (*suku bangsa Bali*) — such as the Dayak or the Atoni, for example — but with the authorized culture of Bali as a “province” (*Daerah Tingkat I Propinsi Bali*) of Indonesia, such as Kalimantan Tengah or Nusa Tenggara Timur. But whereas the Dayak are dispersed across several provinces and the Atoni live among other ethnic groups in one province, Bali’s situation is unique in Indonesia in that its name designates an entity that is at once geographic, ethnic and administrative — and that also happens to be the principal tourist destination of the country. This leads to shifts and overlappings in what is meant by “Bali” — and in fact, when the Balinese speak in the name of Bali, it is most often the province or the tourist destination to which they refer, rather than the ethnic group.

Thus, it is as a province, considered to be a homogeneous and distinctive entity, that Bali is encouraged to promote its “cultural arts” on the national scene — its music and dance, plastic and decorative arts, literature (but not language), costume, cuisine, handicrafts, architecture, and certain picturesque and inoffensive customs, as long as they do not run counter to good morals or

economic development. I will give two examples of such promotion of the Balinese cultural arts.

Not long ago, the extraordinary wealth of Balinese textile traditions was disappearing fast, and its vestiges were avidly sought after by a handful of shrewd collectors (Hauser-Schäublin et al 1991). The Balinese relegated their ancient hand-woven cloths to certain ritual contexts and adopted printed textiles for everyday wear, reserving the batiks imported from Java for their ceremonial clothing and formal dress. Then, with the rise of tourism in the 1970s, dozens of weaving studios began to sell yardage of mechanically reproduced weft ikat (*endek*) cloth to visitors as well as to Balinese. Soon, what had recently been one Balinese textile tradition among many others became representative of Bali, much as batik is of Java. The Governor set the example by exchanging his batik shirt for one of *endek*, and was soon imitated by the Balinese elite. And today, *endek* competes seriously with batik, for clothes as well as for furnishings, in temples as well as offices. But as its use becomes more widespread, *endek* tends to lose its Balinese specificity, and cheap imitations are produced in Java and Lombok. One finds it now decorating the interiors of Jakarta, where most people are unaware of its origins. In short, Balinese *endek* has become Indonesian, like batik, which has progressively lost its Javanese connotation.

Architecture provides another illustration of a similar process. From the beginning of the colonial period, administrative and commercial buildings were strongly influenced by European architecture, as can be seen in both the Bali Hotel of 1928 and the Bali Beach Hotel of 1966, to cite only two examples. At the same time, domestic architecture gave way to prefabricated elements, more and more widely available. In 1974, in reaction to what was perceived as a loss of identity, the Governor declared that henceforth administrative and commercial buildings must bear the marks of their “Balinese character” (*ciri khas Bali*). This was expressed in a profusion of decorative motifs, derived mainly from the elaborately ornate style of Gianyar — in the form of bas-relief friezes and sculptures of scenes inspired by Balinese mythology — veneered onto a functional structure. The result, as may be seen in the architecture of the Art Center of Denpasar and the international hotels of Nusa Dua, is marked by the double seal of gigantism and mannerism, in a concoction of styles that astonishes admirers of traditional Balinese architecture (Wijaya 1986). Under the name of “Bali Style” (*Stil Bali*), this monumental ornamentation now represents “traditional Balinese architecture” in Jakarta, where the Indonesia Museum at *Taman Mini* was designed by the architect responsible for the Art Center in Denpasar. As such, *Stil Bali* has also become representative of “traditional Indonesian architecture”, and in this capacity it served as a source of inspiration for the French architects of the airport in Jakarta. Once consecrated as a recognized example of Indonesian architecture, *Stil Bali* was reinterpreted by the Javanese for their own use to be finally taken up again by the Balinese in a now standardized form[10].

In the light of these examples, and of many others as well, it is clear that what we are seeing is a conscious neo-traditionalism that can be called a “folklorization” of the culture[11]. The folklorized cultural elements are extracted from their original context and combined in an imagery with ethnic connotations to be consumed by the urbanized and Indonesianized Balinese middle classes (those who make up the greater part of the Arts Festival’s public). In effect, only the most mobile members of Balinese society — those already cut off from their rural roots — can recognize themselves in an idealized image intended to represent the Balinese cultural identity on the national scene. One could even say that, as a regional culture, “Balinese culture” refers more to a social group than to an ethnic group. But since this authorized version of Balinese identity, elaborated in Denpasar, is transmitted to the villages via the cultural programs of Indonesian television, the island’s rural population, too, ends up recognizing it as its own.

National integration and provincial differentiation.

Now, through the pervasive reference to “regional cultures”, what we actually are witnessing, in conjunction with the process of national integration, is a policy emphasizing homogenization within each province and differentiation between the provinces. The Indonesian state is aiming to induce in each of its provinces a distinctive homogeneous provincial identity, grounded on a single set of unique cultural features, at the expense of the diverse ethnic cultures enclosed within their boundaries[12]. Such provincial identities are promoted by the regional governments and supported by synthetic images based on a notion of culture stripped down to the “cultural arts”. These images are proposed to the nation for consumption and to the local populations they allegedly represent for authentication. And they are displayed in the regional museums that are being opened in the provincial capitals (Taylor 1994).

Just as “culture” (read “cultural arts”) is being used as a means to defuse potential political problems, the risks inherent in ethnic mobilization are defused by means of a focus on the “region” (read “province”), that is, by shifting the locus of identification from a primordial to an administrative entity. In addition to the rather conspicuous “folklorization” of culture, there is a more discrete, yet no less crucial “provincialization” of ethnicity. In this perspective, the promotion of provincial cultural identities can be interpreted as a safe way for the state to bridge a gap between ethnic identities — regarded as being either irrelevant or else detrimental to the process of nation-building — and the still remote national identity.

While the relative cultural homogeneity of a province like Bali can be reconstituted without too much difficulty into a “typically” Balinese style, the process is rather more delicate with provinces comprising several ethnic groups. The solution, then, is either the selection of certain cultural traits belonging to one prominent ethnic group which are promoted to the provincial level, or the combination of traits borrowed from several different ethnic groups to compose an image considered to be representative of the province.

Be that as it may, not all ethnic groups of a province are called upon to contribute to the regional culture, and not all the constituent elements of a regional culture are called upon to contribute to the national culture — only those judged worthy to be selected as the “cultural summits” (*puncak-puncak kebudayaan*) of each regional culture. Thus the issue is one of a double-barreled process of selection: on the one hand, only certain ethnic groups are considered representative of the Indonesian nation, and as such their culture is destined to become a regional culture; on the other hand, only certain elements of that culture are considered significative of the regional culture, and as such they are called upon to become part of the Indonesian national culture. Two examples will suffice to give an idea of the selection procedure in force in different contexts.

In 1983, the year when the fall of oil revenues prompted the government to give international tourism a greater role, the Indonesian Foreign Minister launched the catch-phrase “Cultural Diplomacy” (*Diplomasi Kebudayaan*). The declared objective of the operation was to promote the image of Indonesia as “a highly civilized nation” (*bangsa yang berkebudayaan tinggi*). The province of Bali, famous for its wealth of cultural traditions, was particularly solicited to contribute, and the troupes of musicians and dancers sent abroad on tour — now called “artistic missions” (*misi kesenian*) — were charged with both promoting Indonesian culture and developing tourism in Indonesia. From this point of view, Cultural Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy seem to be two sides of the same cultural policy. Indeed, the Balinese dance performances shown in foreign

capitals are generally the same as those that have already been successfully staged for tourists in Bali — a practice that goes back, as we have seen, to the Colonial Exposition of 1931. These tourist performances — backed by the “Certificate of Artistic Excellence” granted to troupes authorized to perform for a foreign audience — are considered “summits” of Balinese culture and thus to “reflect” (*mencerminkan*) simultaneously the identity of Bali (*identitas kedaerahan*) and the identity of Indonesia (*identitas Keindonesiaan*). Thus Cultural Diplomacy is intended not only for foreign nations, invited to admire the cultural summits attained by Indonesia, but also for Indonesians — and thus the Balinese —, encouraged to identify themselves with the approved manifestations of the regional cultures composing the national Indonesian culture (Geriya 1988).

The zenith of Cultural Diplomacy to date is unquestionably the gigantic “Festival of Indonesia” in the United States, composed of several hundred cultural events in some fifty cities and which lasted eighteen months (1990-92). The Festival was decided in 1987 with the signing of an agreement between the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs and American Secretary of State. According to its coordinator, its objective was nothing less than to sell to Americans the image of Indonesia as a highly civilized nation where the artistic spirit is constantly awake (Tanen 1991)[13]. Not surprisingly, the approved components of the Indonesian culture are nearly identical to the attractions promoted by the tourism industry, as one may see by the theme of the main exhibitions. There was classical sculpture from the Indo-Javanese period, the court arts (which obviously favor Java and Bali), and the most aesthetically evolved examples of the material culture of the most picturesque ethnic groups of the archipelago — but virtually nothing illustrating Islamic culture as such, in a country where almost nine-tenths of the population is Muslim. One finds more or less the same attractions in the program of cultural events composing the Visit Indonesia Year, which was a sort of local counterpart to the Festival of Indonesia.

Another illustration of the contribution of the regional cultures to the national culture is provided by the “Project for the Research and Study of the Nusantara Culture” (*Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Nusantara*)[14]. The aim of this project, elaborated in 1984 by the Department of Education and Culture, was to record and register the “summits” of the regional cultures of Indonesia in order to reinforce the national culture as the foundation of Indonesian identity. The Balinese culture was one of the five regional cultures selected, along with the Sundanese, Javanese, Malay and Bugis. At the official opening of the “Baliology Project” (*Proyek Baliologi*) held at the Art Center in Denpasar, the Minister of Education and Culture declared that the Balinese cultural traditions must be “conserved” (*dilestarikan*) and “fostered” (*dibinakan*) with the aim of “supporting” (*menunjang*) the national culture, while at the same time exhorting the Balinese to beware of the seductions of “ethnocentricity” (*sukuisme*). He also launched an appeal to the academics and other experts on Balinese culture — primarily the Balinese themselves, but also their foreign colleagues — to select elements of the Balinese culture that are most deserving of being “elevated” (*ditingkatkan*) to become fully part of Indonesian cultural traditions (Bagus 1986)[15].

What is important in this regard is to understand that the conception of Balinese culture as a regional culture implies its decomposition into discrete cultural elements, abstracted from their context to be passed through the sieve of the national ideology and subjected to classification: those judged worthy of contributing to the development of the national culture are safeguarded and promoted, while those considered too primitive or too stamped with ethnicity — those that “smell of ethnocentricity” (*yang berbau sukuisme*) — are to be eradicated. Among the elements of Balinese culture that merit being enlisted into the Indonesian culture, the Minister of Education and Culture mentioned the irrigation cooperatives (*subak*); on the other hand, he rejected cockfights

(*tajen*). The Head of the Regional Office of Culture, for his part, retained the following among the “eminent values of the Balinese culture” (*nilai-nilai luhur kebudayaan Bali*) worthy of inclusion in the Indonesian culture: community mutual help (*gotong royong*); the harmony between human beings, their environment and their Creator (*Tri Hita Karana*); the subjection of beings to the fruits of their actions (*karma phala*); understanding and tolerance (*kerukunan dan toleransi*); and, of course, artistic excellence (Raka 1988). But if the list of Balinese cultural elements destined to join the Indonesian national culture is subject to negotiation and argument, the very principle of a selection of elements with a view to their promotion is never questioned.

This enterprise of selection between the Balinese cultural elements to be conscripted into the Indonesian culture and those which are not judged worthy recalls the attempt of the Balinese authorities to discriminate between that which belongs to religion and that which pertains to custom when it was a matter of deciding which elements of their culture the Balinese should reserve for themselves — those which they hold “sacred” — and which elements may be abandoned to “profane” uses. Once this selection had been made, the task still remained of distinguishing among the elements available for extra-Balinese use those which may be promoted as tourist attractions from those which, to the contrary — because they do not appeal to the tourists or because they may present an unseemly image of Bali — must be eliminated.

It certainly would be wrong to see the regional cultures as the simple result of the cultural policy of the Indonesian state, if only because, on the one hand, state intervention is often locally contested, and, on the other hand, national integration is at the crux of the internationalization of capital and the globalization of culture. Nonetheless, the “Balinese culture” does indeed appear to be in the same position in regard to both tourism and to Indonesia — that is, it is considered a “resource” and as such it is expected to put its “summits” at the disposition of the development of international tourism in Indonesia and of the building of the national Indonesian culture. But for this to be possible, Balinese culture must first be divested of its anthropological singularity, in order to be commensurable with other regional cultures of Indonesia and with the other tourist destinations with which it competes. The touristification of Bali and its Indonesianization combine their implications to place Balinese culture in a series where it is nothing more than one item among others. At this point, the diversity of regional cultures, like that of tourist destinations, appears to be little more than a decorative motif.

Note

[1] As shown by the incorporation in scenes of Balinese life of tourists occupied in their favorite pastimes — photographing a temple festival or abandoning themselves to the joys of surfing near fishermen — in the canvases of successful painters like I Wayan Bendi and I Made Budi. It was, by the way, a painting of the latter that Garuda chose to illustrate its publicity campaign for the Visit Indonesia Year. The most troubling, perhaps, is that the tourists have Balinese features, as if they were no longer really foreign to Bali.

[2] This enthusiasm is not limited only to travel writers; it appears to be generally shared by academics, as in this already old assertion of Stephen Lansing: “The performing arts on Bali are experiencing a renaissance of sorts, with tourists as the new patrons” (Lansing 1974: 46). The same opinion has been affirmed, time and again, especially by Elizabeth Young (1980: 297, 305) and Annette Sanger (1988: 99-100). In this chorus of praises, certain discordant voices nonetheless manage to make themselves heard, such as that of Robert Brown: “The constantly increasing bubbling of activity in the arts during the past twenty years is phenomenal. Is it a healthy sign of energy, the fermentation of a wine of character, or is it the effluvia of decay, of something rotten in the state of Ubud?” (Brown 1979: 50).

[3] One may find an index of this change in the vocabulary used by the Balinese authorities. Although the discourse of Cultural Tourism is formulated in the national language, when they evoke the threat of “cultural pollution” the Balinese frequently use a vernacular term (*leteh*), while the announcement of the “cultural renaissance” goes easily by a foreign terminology (*cultural renaissance*). This double change of language, first from Balinese to Indonesian — with Balinese terms to express key concepts — and then from Indonesian to English — is an index of a displacement characteristic of the position from which the Balinese speak of themselves, as a result of their increasing integration into the Indonesian state and the international tourism industry.

[4] We should remember that the Balinese language — and this goes as well for other vernacular languages of the archipelago — does not have terms corresponding to what we call “art” and “culture”, but refers always to a specific activity, inseparable from its context. This is no longer the case once one passes to the Indonesian language, which has appropriated the abstract notions of “art” (*seni*) and “culture” (*budaya*), in replacement of the Dutch terms *kunst* and *cultuur*.

[5] This is the result of a deliberate decision, for the date of the Festival — which takes place every year during five weeks in June and July — was chosen to coincide with the school and university vacations in Indonesia.

[6] Fredrik deBoer rightly notes that “what was, in the beginning, a product imported from Java has been subject to a process of localization. Features of the imported medium found interesting and workable by the artists and audiences of Bali have been retained, while aspects judged lacking have tended to fall away” (deBoer 1989: 184). In fact, once *Sendratari* was no longer aimed at a foreign audience, the choreographers of the Arts Festival have progressively brought it back to the taste of the Balinese. Instead of being reduced to an hour, a performance now lasts an entire evening and its rhythm is somewhat more flexible. And most important, its verbal components have regained some of their lost importance by the addition of narrators and chorus. The fact remains nonetheless that the constraints of intercultural communication that presided over the creation of *Sendratari* — a linear narrative plot mimed by dancers — has, by suppressing opportunities for improvisation, rendered the role of the *penasar* superfluous, overturning the conception of theater as it had been until then in Bali. As a result, there is a tendency to emphasize the textual version of a dramatic theme, generally of Indian or Javanese origin, to the detriment of Balinese variations that have come about from theatrical experience. This is not to mention the “colossal” (*kolosal*) character of the performances at the Art Center — with hundreds of participants — that completely denatures traditional Balinese choreography. One notes, too, the concomitant rise of a new function, that of the choreographer, charged with staging such and such an episode drawn from the body of literature in use in Bali.

[7] Radio-televised statement, 11 June 1980; personal communication of the author.

[8] Edward Bruner provides an example of similar confusion in Java, when he reports the remarks of a guide deploring that so many tourists come to performances of the Ramayana Ballet at Prambanan that the Javanese can no longer watch them. This guide, too, seems to have forgotten that this performance had originally been created not for the Javanese but for tourists, Indonesian and foreign (Bruner 1991b: 22).

[9] One finds examples of the same process in a number of books intended for school children, which show the provinces of Indonesia based on their representation at *Taman Mini*. One title among others: Nugroho (1984).

[10] *Stil Bali* is not the same thing as that which is celebrated in Bali Style (Walker & Helmi 1995), a visual contemplation of traditional Balinese architecture and its reinterpretation in building styles in Bali’s expatriate community.

[11] Hélène Bouvier describes an analogous process of the “folklorization” of the performing arts in

Madura (Bouvier 1995).

[12] Bernard Sellato explains clearly how this movement is proceeding in Kalimantan (Sellato 1990).

[13] One can imagine that the expected revenues from such an event were sufficiently tangible for large Indonesian and American firms to have invested more than \$6 million — of which \$1.3 million from Mobil Oil alone, who was due to renegotiate drilling rights in Indonesia in 1995.

[14] The term *nusantara* designates the Indonesian archipelago, in the sense of the space encompassing lands and seas (*tanah air*).

[15] Unlike Cultural Diplomacy, the Project for the Research and Study of the Nusantaraian Culture lasted only long enough to publish a few pamphlets before its budget was sharply reduced.

Article mis en ligne le Thursday 8 April 2010 à 00:00 –

Pour faire référence à cet article :

Michel Picard, "Bali: the development of international tourism and the fostering of the national culture.", *EspacesTemps.net*, Works, 08.04.2010

<https://www.espacestems.net/en/articles/bali-development-of-international-tourism-and-fostering-of-national-culture-2/>

© EspacesTemps.net. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the journal's consent prohibited. Quotation of excerpts authorized within the limits of the law.