

Theatre Excursion: Circuit of Culture of Production and Consumption of Traditional Theatre

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at studying the production and consumption of traditional theatre. The study is conducted within cultural studies perspective using Circuit of Culture. In the production layer the focus of the analysis will be on how the traditional theatre is produced either technically or culturally. While on the consumption, the analysis will be on the audience involving in this cultural product. The object of the study is the traditional theatre performed in Rumentang Siang Bandung. The study reveals that the practice of theatre excursion perpetuates production of traditional theatre and presents the consumption space for the audience of traditional theatre. The herds of school students organized by their teachers are having theatre excursion under the program of Taman Budaya to arouse appreciation toward tradition. The circuit of culture of traditional theatre in the context of production and consumption is articulated through the theatre excursion

Keywords: *Circuit of Culture, traditional theatre, production, consumption, theatre excursion*

INTRODUCTION

Tradition is a cultural product which seems to be in two sides of a coin, one of each is definitely different, in contrast but cannot be separated. Tradition is 'sweet' because of its 'bitterness'. It is challenging to be studied when it is threatened to be left behind or disappeared as times evolve. That's more or less the way it is with traditional theatre. Theatre itself faces many difficulties related to production, resources, staging elements, or audience aspects that cannot be compared to other cultural products such as film or music. Moreover when theatre is then paired with tradition, it seems that it is combining the two problems.

Statements asserting that traditional theatre is in problem can be seen in some media writings: Tribun Medan (2017) writes, "Teater Tradisi Mulai Meredup" (Traditional Theatre is Fading away). In the news, a researcher from Balai Bahasa, Suyadi San who is quoted by Gorby, Medan Tribunnews' journalist, contends that traditional theatre is wanning. One of them is because of foreign infiltration. Almost similar to this, Samantha on nationalgeographic.co.id (2014) states that "Teater Tradisi Indonesia Terpinggirkan" (Indonesian Traditional Theatre is Marginalized). This writing reports that traditional theatre is being left by its activists and appreciators. Moreover, it states that the youth are now getting closer to kinds of new

arts which less reflect the nation character. The similar content is also highlighted on the page of kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id under the title "Festival Nasional Teater Tradisional" (The National Festival of Traditional Theatre). This writing focuses to inform the effort taken by Direktorat Pembinaan Kesenian dan Perfilman to conserve the Indonesian traditional theatre by holding a festival. .

Despite the problems, the existence of traditional theatre is still also discussed in different focus. Highlighting the values of *Sandiwara Sunda* for the youth, Dwimarwati and Wita (2013) discuss how a certain theatre group, *Padepokan Seni Ringkang Gumiwang* (PSRK), survives and transmits values to the society especially the youth. The article also reveals that PSRK is the group that can maintain having audience in their *Sandiwara Sunda* performance. Meaning that, PSRK can still exist since there are still audience attending their performance.

Theatre as a cultural commodity is probably best understood as the result of its conditions of production and reception (Bennet, 1997). In other words, every production is designed to induce audience participation (Meyerhold in Bennet, 1997). Regarding the phenomena illustrated previously, the two terms, production and reception which is related to audience, become the issues discussed in this study. More specifically, this study is aimed to study the production and consumption of traditional theatre in the meantime. In the production layer the focus of the analysis will be on how the traditional theatre is produced either technically or

culturally. While on the consumption layer the analysis will be on the audience involving in this cultural product.

METHOD

The nature of the research is qualitative research. The study is conducted to traditional theatres performed in GK Rumentang Siang, Kosambi Bandung, Indonesia. The data are collected through literature study, observation, and in depth interview. The data are discussed within the circuit of culture originated from cultural studies (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997; Han & Zhang: 2009).

The circuit of culture consists of five cultural processes, they are, representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997; Tomblason & Wolf, 2016). The circuit of culture can be seen as an answer to the debate over how (where, when, why, by whom as well) social and cultural meaning of a cultural artefact are produced. The five cultural process of circuit of culture becomes the main point which all are tied up each other (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997). This binding aspect of the model is represented by the two-way arrows called as an articulation. As illustrated diagram 1.

du Gay explains articulation as:

"the process of connecting disparate elements together to form a temporary unity. An 'articulation' is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two or more different or distinct elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, or absolute and essential for all time; rather it is a linkage whose conditions of existence or emergence need to be

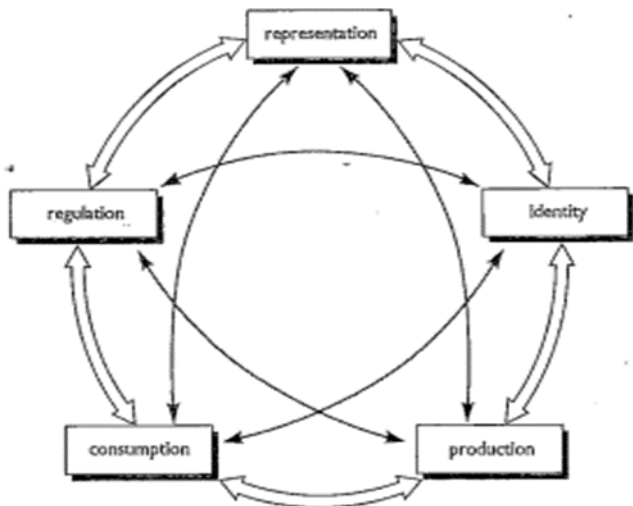


Diagram 1. Two Way Arrows

*located in the contingencies of circumstance.
(1997: 3)*

This writing is a part of multi-year study applying in phases the whole five layers in the circuit of culture, i.e. representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. Within the context of this paper particular attention is paid to the articulation of two layers, production and consumption of traditional theatres performed in GK Rumentang Siang on April and May 2017. However, as it is in the context of circuit, the analysis cannot be wholly separated from the other layers although not being focused.

There are two traditional theatres which are observed during their performance on April and May, 2017. The first is "*Bagaspati Gugur*", a traditional theatre performed by *Sandiwara Sunda Bakekok* from Ciamis, one of the regencies of West Java. The second one is "*Doger Hanoman*" a traditional theatre performed by *Longser Injuk*, a traditional theatre group from Bandung Regency, West Java. These two performances are sponsored by a unit of government institution, *Taman*

Budaya (Cultural Center) of West Java Province under its program to conserve and revitalize traditional arts.

The articulation of production and consumption of those two traditional theatres are discussed based on the following guiding questions (College of Liberal Arts, 2010; du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997).

- Production
 - Follow the money! Who's paying for it, and/or backing it? Where's the money (and other resources coming from?)
 - Who's making or producing it? What is his/her/their story? Socio-economic background? Interests (financial and otherwise)? Personal experiences? Positions (or "biases")?
 - Who thought it up (same questions apply from above)
 - How different are the people who paying for it, making it, and thinking it up? All together living in a co-op? All the same person?
- Consumption
 - Are the people who consume it (or use it, or do it) different from the people who produce it? If so, again as above: how different?
 - Is it something you buy? If so, what does it cost? Who can afford it? Who can't? Why?
 - How, where, with whom, and why do you consume (watch it)?
 - Is it advertised or marketed? If so, how, where, why, and to whom?

To obtain the data related to the production, the in-depth interview is conducted to the related parties in the traditional theatre performances: *Taman Budaya*, *GK Rumentang Siang*, and the director and, or the personnel of the theatre groups performing. The observation is conducted in the day they perform and their rehearsal process. While the consumption data are firstly gained from observing the audiences coming to the related traditional theatre performances either outside or inside the building of the theatre performances. Then followed up by interviewing them in the site of the performance and other meeting spots by appointment. The data are then analysed within the perspective of cultural studies applying the circuit of culture model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Production

The production of the two traditional theatres performed in *GK Rumentang Siang* as the objects of this study is fully sponsored by *Taman Budaya* (Cultural Center) of West Java Province. *Taman Budaya* is a unit under *Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata* (Culture and Tourism Department) of West Java Province. Under its annual program to conserve, revitalize, and utilize traditional arts, *Taman Budaya* provides budget for the process of rehearsal, publication, and single performance of the traditional theatre groups chosen.

In choosing the traditional groups to finance, *Taman Budaya* arranges a kind of proposal selection. The proposal selection is stated to be opened for 27 cities/regencies

in West Java Provinces which is informed through press conference. The selection is conducted by the curator(s) of *Taman Budaya* based on the related fields (Theatre, Dance, or Wayang). However, the proposals granted are also given the term “*pemerataan*” or “equalization” considering the budgets they provide. Meaning that they will choose the groups which haven’t got the chance to be supported rather than those who have. Besides, they will also consider the recommendation of the local government from the related institution. Moreover, the priority of the grant is given to the criteria of the groups applying revitalization, reconstruction, and experimentation before the other kinds of performing arts events.

There are six groups chosen to be grantee of the production budget in 2017. Among six grantees there are only two traditional theatre groups chosen, they are *Sandiwara Sunda Bakekok* from Ciamis Regency and *Longser Injuk* from Bandung Regency. As shown in the following pictures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 and 2 portray the banners for the performances of *Bagaspati Gugur* by *Sandiwara Sunda Bakekok* and *Doger Hanoman* by *Longser Injuk*. The two banners show the similarity in the design since both of them are published by *Taman Budaya* not by the traditional theatre groups that will perform. The institution logo that is inserted on both of the banners are those belong to *Taman Budaya* and *GK Rumentang Siang*, which is still a unit organized under *Taman Budaya*. This implies who owns the productions are the one providing the budget instead of the groups.



Fig. 1. The banner of *Sandiwara Sunda Bakekok*
Doc by Apip, 2017



Fig. 2. The banner of *Longser Injuk*
Doc by Afri Wita, 2017

Moreover, in the position of determining the grantee and providing the production budget, *Taman Budaya* can regulate how the production, in this case, the performances of the traditional theatres can be done and for whom. In this case, the grantees are forbidden to issue the tickets to sell to the audience. Regarding this, *Taman Budaya* facilitates the need for the process as well as the publication. As part of their objective in holding the program to be attended by audience or appreciators, *Taman Budaya* cooperate with schools and kinds of arts community. More specially, they negotiate with school teachers to mobilize their students to attend the theatre event for the sake of appreciating traditional theatre.



Fig. 3. The banner of *Longser Injuk*
Doc by Yadi Mulyadi 2017

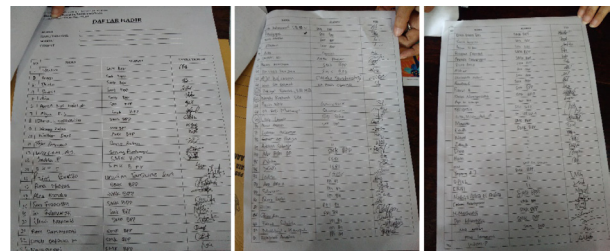


Fig. 4. The audience attendance lis
Doc by Afri Wita 2017

Consumption

The following pictures portray the audience of the traditional theatres observed in this study while watching the performance.

Figure 3 shows that most of the audience are school students still with their school uniforms or some elder people from them who are found out as their teachers. This situation can also be confirmed from some pictures portraying the attendance lists of the audience entering the performance site

It can be seen from figure 4 that there are four columns in the attendance lists. The first

column is for numbering, the second column contains the audience name, the third column tells about where the audience are from, and the fourth one is their signature. The information written in the third column is mostly the name of schools not far from the performance site. The names of the schools written in the list are among others SMK BPP, SDN Soka, MA. PPI 84, St. Ursula, and SMP 21. It shows that the audience of the traditional theatre groups performing are mostly school students.

The students attending the performance are organized by their teachers. Since the performances are sponsored by a unit of government institution under program for arousing appreciation toward tradition, there is no ticket fee that should be paid to watch this theatre event.

which is put in front of the performance room and in the front or entrance gate of the performance site, GK Rumentang Siang. This building is located around a public space, specifically shopping complex and Kosambi market. In other words, placing the banner in the entrance gate will make it easily be read especially by those who are passing by in front of GK Rumentang Siang.

The "Free Ticket" information is also found attracting the audience to attend the event. This is caught by the researchers while observing the site, there is one woman coming closer rather hesitantly asking (in bahasa Indonesia), "can I watch this? Is it free?". Being certain that the event is free, the woman enters the room calmly. Thus, besides the school students coming in herd, it is also found some audience who are not school students.



Fig. 5. The banner publicizing the event
Doc by Apip 2017

Furthermore, the attendance lists on figure 4 also show that the school students come together, like in a study tour. The audience names from the same schools are listed in order showing that they come and attend the theatre in herd. Their attendance as part of a school excursion is a 'special occasion' for the school students. This is also in line with what is contended by Stinson (2014), stating that "many young people who attended as part of a school excursion commented on their enjoyment".

The enjoyment of the school students joining the excursion of the traditional theatre performance can also be seen from the following picture number 6.

Figure 6 shows the enjoyment of the audience from their happy faces, their smile



Fig.6. the enjoyment of the audience
Doc by Yadi Mulyadi 2017

and grinning faces, as well as their body movement following the actor's movement in the performance.

The Theatre Excursion

The word 'excursion' is synonymous with the word 'tour'; 'journey'; 'trip'; or 'outing' (The Oxford Thesaurus). The term 'theatre excursion' is used in previous studies (Sinclair, 2014; Kate & Sallis, 2014; Sinclair & Adams, 2014) explaining about the theatre trip for the students. The theatre excursion is illustrated by Sinclair (2014) in his study investigating the practicalities and logistics related to going to the theatre. While Kate & Salis (2014) discuss theatre excursion in the context of building young people's active critical engagement with theatre. Sinclair and Adams (2014) review the theatre excursion in the context of building theatre confidence. They see that the teacher and the school setting as a key site for the building of theatre confidence. To be more specific, they argue that the theatre excursion is significant for young people scaffolding into a new understanding. In short, the previous studies show the significance of theatre excursion especially for young audience.

In this study, the term theatre excursion is also used to name the theatre trip of school students or the attendance of school students to traditional theatre. It is stated by Sinclair (2014) that family plays the powerful role in the theatre-going behaviours of young people. However, it is also found that the school excursion was critical in providing access to theatre experiences especially for young people who did not have childhood experiences of being taken to the theatre (Sinclair, 2014).

While in the context of this study, the theatre excursion organized by the schools plays a very significant role in maintaining the production and thus the consumption of traditional theatre. The production team of traditional theatre should make sure that their performance will be attended by the targeted audience. Therefore, the production team already has arranged in advance the lists of schools that can be linked and negotiated to organize their students to attend the traditional theatre event. In this case, the target is mostly school students who will come in large groups like doing a study tour or excursion to the museum or historical sites as parts of teaching learning process. The difference is they are doing theatre excursion not any other kind of excursions.

The two pictures, figure 7 and figure 8, portray a group of school students still wearing their school uniforms is queuing for entering the site of the traditional theatre performances. Figure 7 is the performance of *Sandiwara Sunda Bakekok* entitled "*Bagaspati Gugur*". While figure 8 is the performance of *Longser Injuk* entitled "*Doger Hanoman*".



Fig. 7. The school students queuing to enter the performance site
Doc by Apip 2017



Fig. 8. The school students queuing to enter the performance site
Doc by Afri Wita 2017

Both performances were taken place in GK Rumentang Siang Bandung on school days and school time. The first was performed on April 27, 2017, while the later was on May 13, 2017, respectively at 13.30 P.M.

The school students are assigned by their teacher to attend the traditional theatre performance. They come together from their school accompanied by their teachers. This assignment is regarded with the values

of appreciating the tradition. In this case, traditional theatre is contended to be a good media to learn and appreciate the tradition as well as the practice of the traditional theatre performance (Dwimarwati, R. And Wita, A., 2013). The attendance of the students to the traditional theatre assigned will be evaluated and marked for the students' grades of Arts subject or *Bahasa Sunda* and *Bahasa Indonesia* subjects.

On the other side, the assignment of the teachers to the students to attend the traditional theatre performance is also related to their cooperation with the sponsor or the production team of the performance. The sponsor or the production team will negotiate with the surrounding schools close to the performance site. If the traditional theatre performance issues entrance tickets to buy by the audience then the negotiation will be related to some amount of the money or percentage from the ticket for the schools or the teachers organizing their students. While for the performance sponsored by the government or non-profit institutions which do not issue the tickets to buy, the enticement for the teachers will be in the form of appreciation certificate that can be useful for the teachers' credit point.

This kind of negotiation to make audience attend the traditional theatre performance is often ridiculed by a kind of theatre activists who think that audience should come by their own wish not because of being assigned. The movement of large group going for the theatre excursion is not seen as special occasion in theatre by this group of people. It implies that traditional theatre for them is naturally not

with large audience. In other words, it is not common for traditional theatre to be attended by herd of many audience unless it uses a kind of audience mobilization in the name of theatre trip or theatre excursion.

It is to say that the kind of school audience coming in herd because of being assigned by the school is represented as not the prestigious audience. However, it is clear that this kind of audience who perpetuate the production of traditional theatre. The herd of school students confirmed to attend by the negotiation of the production team ascertain that the event will surely have audience. No matter what the audience purpose is but the production team persuades them to come for the sake of tradition, under the program to appreciate and conserve tradition, in this case, traditional theatre. In fact Fleming et al. (2014) contends that schools introduced new audiences into the theatre through school excursions, and the school students attending matinees, or in this case during their school time, represented a significantly broader range of demographic and cultural attendance patterns compared to night-time general public audience. In short, it is clear that, no matter what, the theatre excursion saves the production. The theatre excursion contributes audience to traditional theatre.

CONCLUSION

The circuit of culture of traditional theatre in the context of production and consumption is connected or articulated through the theatre excursion. The five layers in

the circuit of culture: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation, cannot be separated from the practice of theatre excursion. However, the articulation of production and consumption becomes the main focus of this writing.

The practice of theatre excursion enables the production team of traditional theatre ascertain in advance that the traditional theatre they produce will be consumed by herds of school students. In other words, their traditional theatre event will be saved by the audience attending under the program represented by appreciating tradition. The values represented by the discourse of 'tradition' encourage the production team to request for school students to attend. Similarly, the tradition inherent in the text of 'traditional theatre' support the teacher or the school to regulate the students to have an excursion to traditional theatre event. In short, the theatre excursion saves the production and consumption of traditional theatre.

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