

Transformation Of Pecalang's Modern Role: Legacy, Present Role, And Future Expectations

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Abstract. This study investigates the changing function of pecalang, or traditional security officials in Bali, in three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future. Historically, pecalang were largely responsible for preserving customary norms and maintaining order during religious rites. However, with the growing influence of tourism and technology, their responsibilities have evolved, posing issues in sustaining traditional order in the face of globalization. In today's world, pecalang must play a dual function, reconciling traditional duties with secular demands while adjusting to changing societal and governmental requirements. Looking ahead, the rise of digitalization brings both opportunities and challenges, as pecalang are expected to incorporate technology into their work while maintaining their traditional identity. Using a postmodern theoretical framework, this study concludes that pecalang must continuously adapt their functions while preserving traditional values to remain relevant in the face of ongoing societal transformations.

Keywords: Pecalang, tourism, modernization, digitalization, globalization

1 Introduction

Pecalang are traditional security officers in Bali, tasked with maintaining security and order in customary village (desa adat) areas, particularly during religious and cultural ceremonies (1, 2, 3). The role of pecalang reflects a deep connection between local traditions and long-established social norms passed down through generations. Within the context of the desa adat, pecalang serve as enforcers of customary laws and maintain order during religious processions, cultural ceremonies, and daily life (4). Additionally, pecalang are vital symbols of social harmony in Bali, particularly in relation to the principles of Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes balance among humans, nature, and the divine (5).

In recent decades, however, Bali has undergone significant transformations due to modernization, globalization, and the rise of tourism (6). These changes have required pecalang to adapt to new challenges, including interactions with tourists, cultural commodification, and the rapid economic growth in the region. In the face of digitalization and globalization, the role of pecalang has become increasingly complex. They no longer function solely as guardians of tradition but must now maintain security in a broader context (7). This includes managing crowds in tourist areas (8, 5), preserving traditional values during ceremonies that are often attended by international visitors (9), and adapting to digital technology in the execution of their duties, such as in COVID-19 task forces (3).

From this background, three key research problems emerge: (1) The transformation of pecalang's role in the context of modernity and tourism. Tourism in Bali has had a profound impact on social and cultural changes. Pecalang, who initially held sacred roles in maintaining order during traditional ceremonies, are now required to play a more secular and formal role in

managing public events attended by tourists. This shift demands that *pecalang* adapt to a more modern role, which at times may risk undermining the traditional values they are tasked with preserving. (2) The challenges of digitalization and globalization. The digital era introduces new challenges for security and order in Bali. *Pecalang* must confront technological developments that accelerate the spread of information and increase the demand for rapid responses to various situations. Additionally, globalization speeds up the influx of foreign values that may influence the structure of traditional customs and the role of *pecalang*. (3) The erosion of sacred values in Balinese customs. Modernization, particularly driven by tourism and cultural commodification, raises concerns about the potential loss of sacred values in Balinese ceremonies. *Pecalang*, as custodians of tradition, are at the forefront of ensuring that traditional rituals remain meaningful despite the pressures of commercialization.

This research is crucial as it provides an overview of the changes and adaptations in the role of *pecalang* from the past to the present, while also predicting the challenges they may face in the future. Moreover, the findings can serve as a foundation for policymakers and customary communities in Bali to develop appropriate strategies for maintaining the role of *pecalang* as protectors of tradition and order, both in local and global contexts.

The aim of this study is to analyze the evolution of *pecalang*'s role across three temporal dimensions: the past, where they functioned as guardians of customary traditions; the present, where they face modernity and the growth of tourism; and the future, where digitalization and globalization present new challenges. The specific objectives of the study are: (a) To analyze the role of *pecalang* in maintaining customary order in Bali's past; (b) To examine the transformation of *pecalang*'s role in response to modernity and the expansion of Bali's tourism sector; and (c) To assess how *pecalang* can adapt to the era of digitalization and globalization, while continuing to safeguard sacred customary values.

This study employs postmodern theory as an analytical framework to understand the changes in *pecalang*'s role within an evolving society. Postmodern theory rejects the notion of a "singular truth" (10), instead emphasizing plurality, fragmentation, and the deconstruction of established meanings within society (11). In the context of *pecalang*, postmodern theory allows us to see that their role is no longer static as mere protectors of tradition but has transformed into something more dynamic and multifaceted (12). Through this approach, the study explores how *pecalang* can maintain their cultural identity while adapting to the challenges of modernity, digitalization, and globalization.

2 Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the evolving role of *pecalang* from the past to the present and into the future. A qualitative approach was chosen as the study aimed to explore and understand complex and dynamic social and cultural phenomena, including aspects of identity, role transformation, and adaptation within the changing Balinese society. This method allowed the researcher to delve into the perspectives of *pecalang*, customary community members, and other relevant actors through in-depth narrative and descriptive analysis.

1. Research Approach

The study utilized a phenomenological approach (13, 14) and qualitative ethnography (15, 16, 17). The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to explore the subjective experiences of *pecalang* in fulfilling their roles across different time periods—past, present, and future. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how *pecalang* perceived and interpreted their roles within various social and cultural contexts. In parallel, the ethnographic approach provided insights into the patterns of social

and cultural interactions within Balinese society that involved pecalang, particularly in the context of ongoing social transformations.

2. Research Subjects and Location

The research was conducted in several desa adat (customary villages) in Bali, where the desa pakraman system was still implemented, and pecalang served as customary security officers. The research subjects consisted of pecalang from various villages, including those serving in high-tourism areas and those from more remote villages. In addition to pecalang, interviews were conducted with community leaders, customary authorities, and local government officials involved in security regulation. The criteria for selecting research subjects were as follows: (i) Active pecalang serving in desa adat; (ii) Pecalang with more than 10 years of service to capture role dynamics; (iii) Customary authorities or village leaders with oversight over pecalang; (iv) Local officials involved in tourism or security who interacted with pecalang. The research locations were: (a) Desa adat in the Denpasar area, which was a tourism hub; (b) Desa adat in Gianyar and Ubud, known for high cultural activity; (c) Desa adat in Karangasem or Buleleng, which were more isolated from tourism.

3. Data Collection Technique

Data collection in this study focused on gathering in-depth information from the subjects through the following techniques:

- a. In-Depth Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the views and experiences of pecalang regarding their roles in the past, present, and future. These interviews covered topics such as the traditional duties of pecalang, their role transformations amid modernization and tourism, and the challenges they anticipated in the future. Interviews with customary leaders and relevant officials were also conducted to gain a broader perspective on the dynamics of pecalang's role in the socio-cultural and political context of Bali.
- b. Participant Observation. Through participant observation, the researcher actively participated in events involving pecalang, such as securing customary ceremonies or cultural festivals. This technique allowed the researcher to observe how pecalang performed their roles in practice, both in traditional contexts and in events involving tourists or international communities.
- c. Documentation. The researcher collected relevant documents, such as customary regulations (*awig-awig*), government regulations related to pecalang, and reports on pecalang activities during ceremonies or public events. This document analysis helped the researcher understand the legal and structural frameworks governing pecalang's role in Bali.

4. Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (18). This method aimed to identify key themes from the interviews, observations, and document studies related to the changing role of pecalang in various contexts. The steps in thematic analysis included: (a) Data Transcription and Coding. All interview and observation data were transcribed verbatim and coded according to relevant themes. (b) Identification of Main Themes. The main themes were identified based on patterns and categories that emerged from the data, such as "traditional role of pecalang," "challenges of modernity," "interaction with tourists," and "future predictions." (c) Interpretation and Theme Correlation. After identifying the main themes, the researcher correlated these themes to gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of pecalang's role from the past to the future (19).

5. Data Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher employed triangulation by combining the results of interviews, observations, and document studies (19, 20). Additionally, member checking was conducted by asking respondents to review interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (21).

3 Results And Discussion

I. Heritage from the Past: Pecalang as Guardians of Tradition and Religious Ceremonies

Pecalang are traditional security officers who play a crucial role in the social and cultural life of the Balinese community (2). Their primary function is to maintain traditional security, especially in the context of religious ceremonies and customary activities in Bali. As part of Bali's traditional community system, which is based on *desa adat* (customary villages) and *awig-awig* (customary law) (22, 23, 24), pecalang are responsible for maintaining order during traditional ceremonies and ensuring harmony between humans, nature, and the gods, as encapsulated in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (25). This analysis elaborates on how pecalang fulfilled their roles in preserving Bali's traditional customs in the past. It also explores how their roles, originally closely linked with customary practices and spirituality, have evolved as symbols of resistance to modernity, social change, and the internal dynamics of Balinese society.

1. Pecalang and the Social Structure of Customary Communities

The role of pecalang is deeply intertwined with the social structure of the Balinese community and the Hindu-Balinese belief system that governs various aspects of life. The *desa adat*, as the primary social unit in Bali, enjoys autonomy in managing both the spiritual and material aspects of the community, including land management, religious ceremonies, and the enforcement of customary law known as *awig-awig* (26, 27). Under the *desa adat* framework, pecalang are tasked with maintaining security and order during the many ceremonies and customary activities held by the community (28). Their responsibilities extend beyond the secular realm of physical security (1, 25, 2), as they also play a vital role in maintaining cosmological balance, which, according to Balinese belief, is essential for ensuring the continued harmony between humans and nature (5). In this sense, pecalang are not merely "guards" in the physical sense, but also perform a sacred role as protectors against negative forces that might disrupt rituals or threaten the harmony of the customary order.

2. Pecalang in Rituals and Ceremonial Customs

In the past, the role of pecalang was closely associated with the execution of various customary and religious rituals in Bali. Religious ceremonies, such as Galungan, Kuningan, Nyepi, and various other rituals, are integral to the life of the Balinese community (29, 30, 31). During these ceremonies, pecalang are responsible for ensuring security and making sure that the rituals are conducted according to established customary protocols. They also safeguard the ceremonies from external disruptions.

For instance, during Nyepi, pecalang play a crucial role in enforcing the traditional restrictions, including staying indoors, not using fire, and refraining from certain activities. They patrol the community to ensure that these rules are strictly followed and protect the *desa adat* from external interference during the ceremony. This highlights that pecalang do not only carry out secular functions but are also entrusted with safeguarding the sacred values of Hindu-Balinese traditions.

In general, pecalang bear the responsibility of ensuring that all participants in the rituals adhere to the rules, maintaining order during processions, managing traffic (especially

during large ceremonies involving many people), and addressing potential conflicts that might arise during these events.

3. Pecalang as Guardians of Local Wisdom

One of the key concepts in Hindu-Balinese religion that influences the role of pecalang is *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes harmony between humans and the divine (*parahyangan*), humans and nature (*palemahan*), and humans and other humans (*pawongan*). Within this framework, pecalang serve as crucial figures who ensure that customary activities are conducted in harmony with the natural and spiritual environment.

For example, during the *melasti* ceremony (a purification ritual before Nyepi), pecalang are tasked with ensuring the smooth conduct of the procession to the sea for offerings. They must also ensure that the ritual does not disrupt the environmental balance, while maintaining that all participants observe the customary rules throughout the procession. In this role, pecalang are responsible not only for maintaining physical order but also for safeguarding spiritual and ecological harmony.

4. Challenges and Transformation of Pecalang in the Past

Although pecalang have traditionally played a central role in preserving customary practices, they have not been immune to internal and external challenges. Modernization, economic development, and internal political dynamics in Bali have often created tensions between the customary values upheld by pecalang and the evolving needs of society. For example, as Balinese society became increasingly exposed to external influences through trade and tourism, many began to adopt values different from their traditional customs, often affecting how rituals were performed.

However, as guardians of tradition, pecalang have successfully adapted to these changes, maintaining the social and cultural stability of Bali while preserving the customary values that form the foundation of their society. Pecalang have not only continued their role as physical protectors of tradition but have also become defenders of the cultural values that bind Balinese society, both socially and spiritually.

II. Present Role: Pecalang in the Context of Modernity and Tourism

In the modern era, particularly since Bali's development as an international tourist destination, the role of pecalang has undergone significant changes. They no longer function solely within the realms of custom and religion but now play an important role in maintaining security and order at events involving tourism, politics, and public activities. In this modern context, pecalang occupy a unique position, balancing between their customary roles and the demands of modernity. This research analyzes the transformation of pecalang's role within the context of modernity and tourism, exploring how modernization, global capitalism, and social-political dynamics have influenced their identity and functions.

1. Pecalang and the Dynamics of Modernity

Modernity has had a profound impact on Balinese society, especially following the rapid growth of tourism since the 1970s. In this context, pecalang face the challenge of maintaining a balance between local identity and global demands. While in the past, pecalang primarily functioned as guardians of order during customary events, they are now involved in securing large-scale events related to tourism, politics, and international gatherings.

For example, pecalang are often tasked with overseeing security during major celebrations such as Nyepi, which affects not only the traditional life of Balinese society but also the tourism sector, which temporarily shuts down during the holiday. In these situations, pecalang act as intermediaries between the local community and the tourism industry,

ensuring that customary traditions are upheld while also considering the economic interests of the tourism sector.

2. Pecalang and Collaboration with Modern Security Forces

The significant transformation of pecalang's role in the context of modernity is evident in their collaboration with state apparatuses, such as the police and military, particularly in managing security at large events. When Bali hosts international events, such as the annual IMF and World Bank meetings, the role of pecalang is further expanded. They not only function as symbols of custom but also serve as agents of security within formal structures.

Pecalang, in this context, become part of a hybridization between traditional and state forces. Michel Foucault, in his analysis of power, suggests that power operates not only through formal state apparatuses but also through local agents who work at the micro level. Pecalang, as part of the customary community, are now involved in the broader distribution of power, working alongside formal structures in public security.

3. Tourism as a Factor in Changing the Role of Pecalang

The tourism industry has played a major role in changing the function of pecalang (8). Bali, as a world-renowned tourist destination (32), frequently hosts large events that attract thousands of tourists, such as cultural festivals, international conferences, and luxury weddings. In such situations, pecalang serve as key agents in ensuring security, not only in the context of customs but also in the broader context of tourism.

Cultural tourism in Bali has brought significant changes to the customary structure and social system, including the role of pecalang. Pecalang are no longer viewed merely as guardians of tradition but also as part of a security system that bridges the needs of the local community and the demands of tourists. Tourism demands higher security standards, particularly in handling foreign tourists, securing international events, and maintaining public order in tourist areas.

4. Hybrid Identity of Pecalang in the Context of Modernity

The hybrid identity of pecalang is one of the key aspects of their transformation in the modern era. In postmodern theory, identity is not seen as a fixed entity but as something fluid, constantly being shaped through social negotiation. Pecalang, as representatives of traditional customs, now have to adapt to a new identity as part of the tourism industry and the state security apparatus.

They must operate in two different worlds: the world of tradition and the world of modernity. On one hand, they maintain traditional values by securing order during religious ceremonies and rituals, but on the other, they respond to modern demands for higher security standards during international events.

5. Challenges and Opportunities in the Modern Era

Despite the significant changes brought about by modernity and tourism, pecalang also face various challenges. One major challenge is how they can remain relevant and effective in safeguarding customary traditions while facing the pressures of modernity and globalization. There is tension between the desire to preserve traditional identity and the need to respond to the rapidly changing demands of modernity.

However, there are also opportunities for pecalang to seize. As awareness grows regarding the importance of security and cultural preservation, pecalang can play a larger role in maintaining Bali's cultural identity. They can become important icons of Balinese tradition, recognized not only by the local community but also by tourists and the international community. In the digital era, pecalang can also leverage technology to enhance their

III. Future Outlook: Pecalang in the Era of Digitalization and Globalization

In the era of digitalization and globalization, many traditional institutions face significant challenges in maintaining their relevance and function. Pecalang, as the guardians of Balinese customary security, find themselves at a crossroads between preserving their traditional role and adapting to the demands of an increasingly modern world. Postmodern theory offers a valuable analytical framework for understanding how the identity and role of pecalang will evolve in the future. This theory focuses on the deconstruction of stable narrative structures and emphasizes plurality, hybridity, and fragmented identities (33). In this context, this analysis will explore how pecalang may navigate between customary traditions, digital technology, and the impacts of globalization in the future.

a. Pecalang in the Era of Globalization: Fluid Identity

Postmodern theory, particularly through the ideas of Jean-François Lyotard, critiques grand narratives and highlights the importance of locality and plural identities in facing globalization (33, 34). Pecalang, who initially embodied the identity of guardians of customary and spiritual order, now face the deconstruction of this traditional narrative due to the penetration of global influences. In the era of globalization, the identity of pecalang is no longer fixed but is becoming increasingly fluid, evolving to meet emerging social, economic, and political needs arising from Bali's integration into the global world.

In this framework, pecalang can no longer be understood solely as local customary guardians. They must manage the complex relationships between local and global forces. The concept of hybrid identity becomes a key lens through which to understand how pecalang navigate between preserving the sacred Balinese traditions and responding to the pressures of modernity brought by globalization, including international tourism, cultural commercialization, and rapid social change.

In the postmodern world, pecalang are involved in the play of symbols and simulacra. Jean Baudrillard argues that the postmodern world is dominated by simulation and representation (35, 36, 37), where the original meaning is often distorted or fragmented. The role of pecalang in safeguarding customary security can also be viewed as a simulation of their traditional role, now facing changing meanings in a global context. Pecalang are no longer just protecting the "real" (customary traditions) but are also involved in preserving the representation of those traditions in front of a global audience, such as tourists and tourism stakeholders. The customary identity they protect is now intertwined with economic value and the cultural image projected globally.

b. Digital Technology and Pecalang: Hybridity and Adaptation

In postmodern theory, digital technology not only changes how people interact but also redefines the boundaries of reality and social space (39, 40). This is relevant to the future transformation of pecalang, where digital technology will influence how they perform their duties and interpret their roles. The use of digital tools, such as social media, digital surveillance systems, and mobile applications, can be seen as part of the hybridization between customary traditions and modern technology.

In this context, pecalang become hybrid agents, blending traditional roles with digital technology. Instead of viewing technology as a threat to tradition, postmodern theory emphasizes how technology can serve as a tool for renegotiating meaning and identity. Pecalang can utilize digital technology to strengthen their role as customary guardians by integrating technology into traditional practices. For example, the use of mobile applications to monitor customary activities or manage security during customary events in public spaces

can serve as a tool to facilitate pecalang's duties while maintaining their relevance in the digital era.

Digital technology also enables the creation of a "virtual space" for Balinese customs (41, 42). Pecalang can act as custodians of custom in the digital space, ensuring that information about customs and rituals distributed through social media and other digital platforms remains authentic and is not misused. Here, Baudrillard's concept of simulation resurfaces: the customs guarded by pecalang no longer exist solely in the physical realm but also as representations in digital space that can be accessed by a global audience.

c. The Fragmentation of Pecalang's Role in the Future

One of the key characteristics of postmodernism is fragmentation (34), where previously stable structures of identity and role now experience disintegration. Pecalang, who in the past had a clear role as customary guardians, may face a fragmentation of their functions in the future. On the one hand, they must continue to perform traditional customary duties related to religious ceremonies and rituals. On the other hand, they must also adapt to the new demands presented by globalization and digital technology.

This fragmentation is also reflected in the plurality of pecalang's roles. In one context, pecalang function as local customary security guardians tied to their spiritual communities. However, in another context, they may serve as security personnel for international events involving tourists and global actors. This fragmentation should not be seen as a weakness but rather as a reflection of pecalang's ability to adapt and manage their identity in various different contexts.

Stuart Hall, in his theory of cultural identity (43), argues that identity in the era of globalization and postmodernism is open and constantly in the process of "becoming." Pecalang's identity is also moving towards a continuous process of becoming, where they no longer hold onto a single stable identity but incorporate various traditional and modern elements depending on the situation they face. Pecalang's identity in the future will become more fluid, adaptive, and responsive to the challenges presented by technology and globalization.

d. Globalization, Technology, and De-traditionalization

Postmodern theory also touches on the aspect of de-traditionalization, where the processes of modernization and globalization compel customary communities to alter or even abandon some aspects of their traditions (44). In the context of pecalang, de-traditionalization may occur when the demands of modernity and globalization pressure them to restructure how they perform their customary duties. However, in the postmodern era, this de-traditionalization does not necessarily mean the loss of tradition, but rather the opportunity to create new forms of customary practices that are more relevant to the modern world.

In Anthony Giddens' study of modernity (45), he explains that traditions never fully disappear but are constantly recontextualized in modern society. Similarly, pecalang in the future may continue to preserve Balinese customary traditions, but in forms that are more flexible and adaptive to social change. Digital technology and global influence may encourage pecalang to modify some aspects of their customs, but this does not imply that these traditions are lost. Rather, they are transformed into something more hybrid and complex.

This analysis highlights the adaptive potential of pecalang as they navigate between tradition and modernity in a world increasingly shaped by digital technology and globalization. The future of pecalang lies in their ability to innovate and integrate new

elements into their traditional roles, ensuring that they remain relevant while maintaining the core values of the Balinese cultural heritage they safeguard.

4 Conclusion

Traditionally, *pecalang* served as the guardians of Balinese customary customs, with responsibilities that included physical, spiritual, and social security during customary rites. *Pecalang*, as an essential component of the social structure of Balinese customary villages, kept ceremonies in order, protected spiritual balance within the community, and perpetuated Balinese customs and culture in the face of societal change. *Pecalang* serve as a symbol of Balinese cultural endurance, preserving a centuries-old customary identity.

In the context of modernity and tourism, the role of *pecalang* has undergone significant transformation. From being guardians of local customary traditions, they have now become agents responding to the demands of modernity, tourism, and globalization. *Pecalang* are involved in collaborations with state authorities, ensuring security at international events, and balancing customary values with the needs of the tourism industry.

Through a postmodern lens, it becomes clear that the identity and role of *pecalang* are not static. *Pecalang* have undergone a process of identity hybridization, where they play dual roles as both guardians of tradition and modern agents. While this transformation brings challenges, it also presents opportunities for *pecalang* to expand their roles in ensuring security, preserving culture, and responding to the social changes occurring in Bali.

Within the framework of postmodern theory, the future of *pecalang* will be characterized by identity hybridity, role fragmentation, and adaptation to technological and global changes. Their identity will no longer be stable or confined to a single grand narrative as traditional guardians of custom. Instead, *pecalang* will continue to negotiate with various external influences, including the demands of modernity and digital technology, to create a fluid and dynamic new identity.

Postmodern theory emphasizes that this transformation is not a threat to tradition but rather a natural part of the evolving, pluralistic world. *Pecalang*, in the future, will play a more complex role as custodians of tradition, cultural identity managers, and agents who integrate technology with custom. In an increasingly interconnected world, they will serve as an important symbol of how local identities can survive and thrive amidst the currents of globalization.

Pecalang hold a crucial role in maintaining customary security and order in Bali, from the past to the present. In facing the challenges of globalization, modernity, and digitalization in the future, *pecalang* must strengthen their traditional identity while adapting to technology and the demands of the modern world. With strategic measures such as training, technological utilization, collaboration with formal institutions, and customary education, *pecalang* can remain relevant and continue to contribute to preserving Bali's harmony in the midst of global change.

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