

Narrative Construction of Ragil Kuning as a Digital Literary Tourism Icon in Kampung Budaya Polowijen

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Abstract. This study offers a new perspective in viewing tourism as literature. There was a correlation involving the form of oral literature as a tourism attraction. Oral literature-based tourism development was presented in the mythological story of Panji that is found in Kampung Budaya Polowijen (Polowijen Cultural Village). The mythology was visualized in the art of Topeng Malangan. The story framing redeveloped the characterization of Ragil Kuning in Topeng Malangan. Ragil Kuning is the younger sister of Panji Asmorobangun from Panjalu Daha Kingdom. The iconic framing of Ragil Kuning started to be developed and shaped in performing arts and festivals. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, it significantly affected tourism. Policies on social mobility influenced tourism livelihoods and the economy of society. In this context, tourism became a sector that was susceptible because of the pandemic. On the other hand, the tourism sector could also become strong or resilient. This resilience was shown by the strategic efforts of Kampung Budaya Polowijen to develop digital-based cultural tourism and to strengthen the Ragil Kuning narration as its tourism attraction. This study employed digital patchwork ethnography. These methods were chosen as an effort in conducting a research in this pandemic era.

Keywords: Village, Tourism, Culture, Narration, Literature Tourism

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that has occurred globally has caused tourism in Indonesia to undergo changes. Further, stated that COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has adverse effects for the human and social dimensions. Several prior studies have concerned the SARS epidemic and its influence on tourism [1][2][3]. Meanwhile, Gopalakrishnan [4] evaluated with usage of the GTAP general equilibrium model that the implications of the COVID-19 crisis on the tourism sector may be resolved through comprehensive efforts of recovery.

This study attempts to offer a new perspective by relating tourism and literature. According to Sudarmanto [5], in tourism, oral literature belongs in the category of tourist objects and appeal, which includes everything that comprises appeal for tourists to visit, whether taken from nature, culture, or special interests. Many regions have developed these objects, more specifically in relation to mythology as part of oral literature in the presentation of media as tourist appeal.

There are many myths and legends in society that may be made as the foundations to determine the development of new tourist locations. These existing myths and legends certainly need to be packaged or “manipulated” in order to draw visitors. One of the examples of tourist objects that have succeeded in development by empowering existing folklore heritage is

Kampung Budaya Polowijen (KBP). The development of tourist appeal at KBP was conducted by building up the narrative tradition of Topeng Malangan through the featuring of the distinct character of Ragil Kuning. This building up was based on the myth of Panji; Ragil Kuning is a protagonist, the younger brother of Panji Asmorobangun and the wife of Raden Gunungsari. In this context, it can be seen that the KBP tourist destination makes a myth and historiography as part of the tourist appeal. Further, the packaging of the Ragil Kuning narrative and branding is affirmed by the claim that the mask of Ragil Kuning is as an authentic mask among the remnant relics of Mbah Reni (the master of Topeng Malangan).

The packaging of the Ragil Kuning narrative and branding as the icon of KBP was conducted with the innovation of presenting digital-based media as a solution for tourism development in the pandemic era. The creation of cultural presentation that is developed by KBP is called Virtual Cultural Tourism. Therefore, the following are the formulated questions that are presented for this study: what was the construction process for the Ragil Kuning narrative as the icon of tourist appeal for Kampung Budaya Polowijen? And what is the visualization of the narrative that is presented in digital tourism as the response for tourism development in the pandemic era?

Tourism becomes the sector that directly receives the consequential effects from the global disaster. Global tourism is at a condition of near-vulnerability. This vulnerability has triggered a recession in the economy and other aspects of life. However, the writing of this study becomes an attempt to examine that tourism is a vulnerable sector yet at the same time resilient toward disasters or crises. This includes when being faced with the COVID-19 pandemic situation as a global disaster by examining the aspect of cultural continuity and the creative step in developing tourist appeal at Kampung Budaya Polowijen (KBP), City of Malang, East Java.

This study offers the examination of cultural narrative construction in tourism through the perspective of literary tourism at KBP. In this context, it can be observed that literature utilizes two important aspects, which are aesthetics and imagination, in building up works of prose and myths through images of characters and settings. As for tourism, its important aspects are profitability and hospitality, for which the aspect of hospitality is enjoyed greatly by tourists and creates tourist appeal with economic value [6]. This study becomes important to be conducted, considering that the City of Malang is conducting efforts to uncover the culture that is distinct to the city.

2 Research Method

This article is based on data that was collected from June-September of 2020 with digital patchwork ethnography. Patchwork ethnography offers a new way to acknowledge and accommodate how researchers' lives in their full complexity shape knowledge production. This method refigure what counts as knowledge and what does not, what counts as research and what does not, and how we can transform realities that have been described to us as "limitations" and "constraints" into openings for new insights (culanth.org). Digital ethnography is used to tell a story when the materials are posted on digital media.

The data collection technique utilized the method of limited participant observation to describe meanings and important events in society directly (witnessing) despite being on a limited scale due to the pandemic. In-depth interviews were conducted online in order to create dialogs between the researchers and the informants. These dialogs would later on aid researchers to examine matters that are seen through the viewpoint of local society. The informants that

were referred to in this study are actors of the development of KBP and the community around KBP. Meanwhile, further data collection was conducted from May-July 2021 with the digital ethnography model by tracing data through websites and online mass media, and interviews with informants were conducted through social media due to limited access during the COVID-19 pandemic and several health protocol regulations related to the situation.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Context of Discovery of Kampung Budaya Polowijen Traditions

This study attempts to examine the aspect of tourist appeal development by bringing up and framing the character of Ragil Kuning in the myth of Panji through Topeng Malangan. Specifically, Ragil Kuning is not the main character in the myth, but is made into an icon of tourist appeal for Kampung Budaya Polowijen (KBP). There had been a claim that stated that the mask of Ragil Kuning that is present at KBP is the last remaining relic of the ancestors of Reni. The repackaging of the Ragil Kuning narrative in the context of tourist appeal is examined through the perspective of literary tourism.

The locus of Kampung Budaya Polowijen, as a region that is capable of developing cultural tourism, has conducted a series of efforts to present a tourist attraction. Based on the history of the origin of Topeng Malang, one part of which is from Polowijen as mentioned above, KBP uncovered the potential of and revived the Topeng Malang art form as one of the cultural icons of the City of Malang by actively organizing Topeng Malang dances and the creation of Topeng Malang handicrafts. Uncovering the distinct potential of Topeng Polowijen from the City of Malang is a complex matter. The issue is that there had been a prior distinct Topeng icon that originated from Pakisaji and Tumpang.

Topeng Malangan is a distinct culture of Malang that contains many religious and spiritual values of the people of Malang. Much of the literature states that the existence of masks (*topeng*) in Malang has persisted since the year 760 AD during the time of the oldest kingdoms in East Java. In the past, the usage of masks was very much related to the politics and rule of the King. Masks were made of gold and utilized to cover the dead bodies of kings. Masks in this period were called by the term of *Puspo Sariro* (the flower from the deepest heart) and were made as symbols of veneration toward the king and his ancestors.

According to Kuswadi Kawindrasusanta and Rahmadi Ps., masks in Indonesia are utilized as one of the media in performing the summoning of ancestral spirits that is meant to be a call for help, through possession of the wearer of the mask by the ancestral spirits. This special ceremony had been performed by King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit when he commemorated the 12-year anniversary of the death of Sri Raja Patni (his grandmother). This ceremony was called *Shraddha*; it was performed at the grave and a mask was created that was called *Sang Hyang Puspasharira*. Leaving behind old traditions, masks changed functions to be utilized in art as dance props. This is then what led to the emergence of many forms of dances with masks as props, one of which is the art of Topeng Malangan.

The model or form of characters and traits of Topeng Malangan is affirmed by coloring with a combination of the five basic colors of red symbolizing bravery, white symbolizing purity, black symbolizing wisdom, yellow symbolizing pleasure, and green symbolizing youth and peace. Not only as a form of carving art made from the wood of *sengon* (yellow mimosa), Topeng Malangan is also exhibited as dance performance art in Malang. The dance

performances of Topeng Malangan always act out the myth of Panji that tells the story of the romance of Raden Panji Asmrobangun (Inu Kertapati) with Putri Sekartaji (Candra Kirana) along with Topeng Bapang and Klono. The story of Panji became the inspiration for mask dances that have existed since hundreds of years ago and became parts of traditional ceremonies or the retelling of ancient stories from the ancestors. Each mask of Topeng Malang is owed to a different character, which is also true for the dance moves, being different for each character. Usually, during a performance, actors only change masks to play the characters that are being performed. The primary wardrobe such as clothing, pants, and *sampur* (scarf), however, does not change. The dancers only change their masks and *irah-irahan* (headwear).

Topeng Malangan became the priority for tourism development at Kampung Budaya Polowijen. In 2011, the Ragil mask was discovered by Yudit Perdananto, after having been lost for many years and having become one of the most sought-after masks. In the end, the mask of Ragil Kuning became the proof of the work of Mbah Reni that presently remains. With such a historical background that is very strong, Kampung Budaya Polowijen in a very spirited manner preserved Topeng Malangan and then positioned Ragil Kuning as the primary icon. Ki Demang gave the following explanation:

The objective is to preserve Topeng Malang, because one of its origins is Polowijen, as Mpu Reni, who is called the Mpu Topeng (master of masks). The master was from Polowijen and died in Polowijen. So, it needs to be preserved. The masks of Ragil Kuning and Gunungsari become the distinct character of Kampung Budaya Polowijen. Why is there the mask of Ragil Kuning? Because this is the last mask that we found in Polowijen, which becomes an icon. Why must there be Gunungsari? Because he is the husband of Ragil Kuning (Ki Demang, 2020, quoted from the opening of Sesebaran Topeng Malang).

3.2 Construction of the Ragil Kuning Narrative in the Study of Literary Tourism and Digital Development

The discovery of cultural materials is also related to the development of traditions in the accompanying society. The packaging of tradition can be accommodated through tourism. Thus, in this context, tourism also plays the role of media for the preservation of traditions through commodification. The article mentions that the development of tourism, anywhere it takes place, has the primary objective of improving the economy. Commodification does not need to ruin existing cultures, even though additions or changes occur toward the culture that has already existed previously. This can be seen in the case of the narrative construction for Ragil Kuning as the icon of Kampung Budaya Polowijen, for which the process is conceived as “inventing tradition” [7]

In 2015, the discovery of the Ragil Kuning mask that had been thought to be lost for decades began to surface. Based on what had been reported the mask of Ragil Kuning was successfully rediscovered by Yudit, an enthusiast of the art of Topeng Malangan. This discovery of the mask that was said to be the last mask that belonged to Mbah Reni is what became the beginning of the association of Ragil Kuning in every activity that is organized at Kampung Budaya Polowijen.

In the stories of Panji, Ragil Kuning is the younger sister of Panji Asmrobangun, who is described as a figure who is beautiful and gentle and is the symbol of a woman who is loyal and full of devotion. Ki Demang stated that Dewi Ragil Kuning or Dewi Onengan is the daughter of Raja Jenggala Manis, whose name is Prabu Amiluhur. The visual depiction of her mask is always associated with her complexion that is yellow-colored, of a gentle expression, and marked by flower carvings on the crown decorations on her head.

In every activity that is organized by Kampung Budaya Polowijen, Ragil Kuning became the irremovable element from them. There are several stories that are presented by Kampung Budaya Polowijen in relation to Dewi Ragil Kuning. In 2018, the Gebyak Wayang Topeng Polowijen event was held with the theme of “*Mbalike Ragil Kuning (The Return of Ragil Kuning)*”. The story that was told during the event was that the Sekar Kedaton of the Kingdom had gone missing from the palace. All relatives of the royal family were at once confused in seeking where the princess went. Prabu Klono took advantage of this opportunity to seek Dewi Ragil Kuning and to plan to make her as his wife later on. Set in the middle of a forest, Dewi Ragil Kuning while alone met with Prabu Klono. Prabu Klono then forced her to be taken to Keraton Prabu Klono. During her escape, Dewi Ragil Kuning met with her love, Raden Gunungsari. This then triggered a conflict between Prabu Klono and Raden Gunungsari. In the end, Prabu Klono lost and had to return to his country. Meanwhile, Dewi Ragil Kuning was brought back home to Keraton Jenggala. For this reason, Dewi Ragil Kuning was then linked to a character of loyalty and full devotion, in accordance with the explanation of Ki Demang:

Dewi Ragil Kuning was known for her beauty. Many kings wanted to propose to her. However, her love and loyalty remained toward Raden Gunung Sari (Surya Malang, 2018).

Then, in 2019, Ragil Kuning returned as a giver of life in a performance that was conducted by Kampung Budaya Polowijen. At that time, the dance of Ragil Kuning was performed in the pre-show for Festival Panji Nusantara it was reported that five dancers performed elegantly and gracefully, waving their green scarves beautifully. Then, in 2020, Kampung Budaya Polowijen in commemorating the Suro (Javanese New Year) organized an event entitled *Sesekaran* Topeng Malangan. This event was held virtually and can be seen through the YouTube channel of INSPIRE media TV. In contrast to the story that was told in 2018, the story that was told at this time is the story of Ragil Kuning who held a *sodo lanang* contest. This contest is then what led her to meet with Raden Gunungsari. Raden Gunungsari, who was interested in participating in the contest, intended to climb down the mountain, accompanied by the birds, monkeys, and other animals. Ki Demang explained that the story is indeed a form of development that is conducted by Kampung Budaya Polowijen, but he affirmed that the meeting of Ragil Kuning and Raden Gunungsari was truly as such. The retelling of this story was conducted in the initial fragment of Anoman Gandrung, right before conducting the activity of *nyekar* (laying flowers) at the grave of Mbah Reni.

In addition to telling the story of Ragil Kuning, this event also displayed a Ragil Kuning dance in the closing fragment after having conducted the *nyekar* activity at the grave of Mbah Reni. In this event, it can be seen clearly that Ragil Kuning occupies her own place for Kampung Budaya Polowijen. This includes how the fragment of Anoman Gandrung became the marker for the start of the *sesekaran* event to the grave of Mbah Reni and the fragment of the Ragil Kuning dance became the conclusion for the core event. The placement of the two fragments to open and conclude the core event emphasizes that Ragil Kuning became the core icon that possesses value and meaning for Kampung Budaya Polowijen.

Historically, as has been mentioned at the beginning, the Ragil Kuning mask is the mask that is believed to be the last mask by Mbah Reni, also known as Tjondro Soewono. The figure of Mbah Reni himself has gained a great reputation in the City of Malang, who is famous as a performance art painter and has succeeded in making Polowijen famous during his time, as a center for the creation of furniture and carvings in Malang. Up to that time, Polowijen was briefly known as “Desa Reni (Reni Village)”. His expertise in handicrafts and various other kinds of art led to his great repute. Many of his works are desirable, particularly masks, because they are believed to possess their own aura when they are worn during mask performances

(*wayang topeng*). Many have also stated that the masks feel “alive” when they are worn. However, many of his works have been lost and cannot be rediscovered.

This matter certainly becomes the primary value in drawing attention from the greater public. Historical and original narratives for the Ragil Kuning mask along the stories that were developed have aided Kampung Budaya Polowijen in forming its self-image. However, historical and original narratives do not spontaneously function in a simple framework and function independently. This is more or less also very much affected by the actors that work in the development of Kampung Budaya Polowijen itself.

This principle of “development with simplicity” is then what became important to be balanced by values of “sacredness” and complete spirituality that are obtained from the involvement of spiritual dancers. This is useful in reinforcing the historical value of Ragil Kuning yet also without reducing the attractive value of Kampung Budaya Polowijen. Referring to the data above, it can be seen that the claim of Topeng Malangan culture and invented tradition cannot be removed from the motivation of maintaining traditions with innovations. “invented tradition” is an act of making “old” or traditional culture emerge again. The view regarding invented tradition is that it is explained as an act of returning traditions to certain groups of people. In explaining the theory, Hobsbawn stated that:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past... [It] is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition [7].

This innovation is called cultural tourism. The development of tourism and cultural preservation in this context becomes the material in the commodification of culture. The link among culture, tradition, and tourism occurs when the people who possess culture harmonize cultural values with tourism, making it possible to conduct the innovation of tradition and even the formation of traditions based on the past [8].

The scheme of making culture re-emerge in the area of the Topeng Malangan tradition in the Polowijen region in relation to modern elements fully represents the act of “invented tradition”. However, the pattern of “invented tradition” that is being raised does not only concern a traditional form and it has instead been inverted into a modern form. Through a festival, the area of “invented tradition” is not only put through an emergence process; it also goes through a creative process of several stages.

The narration of the story of Ragil Kuning can strengthen the image of cultural tourism, particularly for the City of Malang. This approach combines the two characteristics of fictional synergy in literature with factuality in tourism. The existing potential may be synergized with good planning, and thus in the future, development strategies for tourist areas may be planned in other places by making literature as the tourist appeal. Considering the effects of tourism toward destinations as has been articulated in folk stories, there is the emergence of various interpretations toward the images of characters and narrative backgrounds that are being presented. In the end, there is not a single interpretation of characters and backgrounds [9].

Takes the view that the model of the literary tourism approach is as a new method for an objective instrument of thought or analysis. Literature utilizes two aspects, which are aesthetics and imagination, in building up work through images of characters and backgrounds. Meanwhile, tourism contains the aspects of profitability and hospitality, for which the aspect of hospitality becomes tourist appeal with economic value. The approach of literary tourism in this

case utilized a study of a literary work with the theme of the tourism [6]. Further, literature can strengthen the image of tourism by combining the fictional nature of literature with the factual nature of tourism. If the potentials of both can be utilized with good planning, this will have the potential to become an effort for the development of a tourist area with the highlighted primary appeal being that of literature.

There are a few areas of study coverage in literary tourism, which are literary place, literary figure, and literary event. Thus, in this case, the discovery of traditions and strengthening of characters can build on the three study coverage areas of literary tourism. In relation to the above, the interests of the two primary elements may be discerned. The interests of literature come from its two important aspects of aesthetics and imagination in how images of characters and narrative backgrounds construct its works. Meanwhile, the interests of tourism come from its two important aspects of profitability and hospitality. In activities of tourism, it can be seen that there is a tendency toward the profitability aspect that is positivistic in nature, in which tourism is something that is profitable and sustainable. Tourism tends to take advantage of various products of society that may be made into tourist appeal for which its profitability can be calculated.

4 Conclusion

In the context of tourism development of KBP, the development of its culture of masks becomes one part of its tourist appeal. The establishment of this tourist appeal is based on the archeological-historic context and its narrative of formation. This narrative of formation covers the claim to a place and figure that is indicated by the grave of Mbah Reni as the founder Topeng Malangan, discovery of tradition, and strengthening of the figure-icon of the Ragil Kuning mask as the distinct character of Polowijen. This claim is based on the narrative of the remnant mask relics of Mbah Reni and the narrative of the tradition of *sesekaran* event for the masks. The cultural claim of Topeng Malangan and the invented tradition at Kampung Budaya Polowijen are inescapable from the motivation of maintain tradition with innovation. Hobsbawm [7] “invented tradition” is the act of bringing out “old” or traditional culture again. The view regarding invented tradition is explained as an act of returning traditions to certain groups of people. The three coverage areas of literary place, literary figure, and literary event in literary tourism provides a strengthening of the tourism identity of Kampung Budaya Polowijen.

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