

BALI – A Traditional Society in Transformation

Anak Agung Gde Agung¹ Rina Suprina^{1*} Arissetyanto Nugroho²
1.Trisakti School of Tourism, Indonesia
2.Universitas Mercu Buana, Indonesia

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to highlight the cultural and environmental erosions in Bali caused by the effects of globalization through mass tourism, worldwide communication, international fashion and culinary as well as other aspects of modernity. Bali is not only inundated by countless hotels, malls, restaurants and never-ending concrete roads that clutter the once unique rice terraces and breathtaking vistas to fulfill the needs of the ever growing influx of mass tourism but is also suffers erosion of its age long tradition and heritage due to the same external threats. These foreign onslaught have posed negative impacts on the biocultural diversity of this small island of some 3 million inhabitants who have to bear the brunt of a mass tourist invasion of more than twice its population. The Balinese has potent traditional ecological knowledge (tek) and a philosophy of life called Tri Hita Karana that can deter those negative influences, because their philosophy of life forms a sacred balance as a basis to face all life challenges. However, to what extent and for how long can they be staved off is another question that this article aims to analyze and provide some provoking thoughts.

Keywords: Bali, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Tri Hita Karana, Sacred Balance.

DOI: 10.7176/JCSD/59-03

Publication date: May 31st 2020

1. Introduction

Bali, one of the most well-known island located in Indonesia, not only has the world's most unique rice field terraces, beautiful vistas and white sand beaches with glittering clear waters that dot its landscape but also nurtures a rich tradition and culture interred from a time immemorial heritage.

It is this tradition and culture that for the past few decades have faced a fast growing invasion of the negative effects of globalization brought by mass tourism, lightening-speed communication, a multiplicity of languages and other influences of a rapid interconnecting world.

Bali, however, is not without its defenses. It has a viable traditional ecological knowledge that can cope with its agro-cultural practices and environmental upkeeps as well as a strong philosophy of life called Tri Hita Karana with its cosmovision of three worlds governing humankind's beliefs and behavior. Tri Hita Karana teaches Balinese that he is surrounded by three worlds, namely that of his fellow beings, his environment and his spiritual belief. These three worlds each have their own characteristics and guidelines which have to be followed but all three are interrelated to form a Sacred Balance that is the basis for a harmonious, adaptable way of life which can surmount all challenges.

Indigenous people's philosophy of life provides better insights into the issues of human-environment among various cultures of the world (Agung, A. et al 2019). Armed with these principles and beliefs, Bali faces the challenges of modernity. But gapping holes are appearing in the armor. Both ecology and culture are suffering and if not coped could well mean the end of Bali's identity as we now know it.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

'Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) encompasses local peoples' knowledge, beliefs and practices concerning their interaction with their environment which has evolved within the Balinese's traditional practices, particularly outside universities and research centres and handed down over many generations as part of the Balinese culture (cf. Berkes 1993; Warren 1995, Slikkerveer & Dechering 1996; Slikkerveer 1999). Since Traditional Ecological Knowledge has shown to be the basis for local-level decision-making in daily life in many rural communities, it also includes the use, management and conservation of natural resources and as such is inherently dynamic, holistic and evolving through local experimentation and innovation.

It is interesting to assess to what extent certain aspects of the island's system of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as a specific part of the overall 'Indigenous Knowledge System' (IKS) could be relevant for the understanding of the resilience of Balinese culture against the negative impacts of globalization.

2.2. Tri Hita Karana

Literally, *Tri* translates to three, *Hita* to well-being and *Karana* to causes. *Tri Hita Karana* thus means the three causes to achieve well-being for humanity. It is the most basic of Balinese philosophy of life which calls for man, in order to achieve spiritual and physical prosperity, to maintain a harmonious and balanced relations with the

three environments that surround him, namely the *Parahyangan* (spiritual), *Pawongan* (social) and *Palemahan* (natural) environments.

The *Tri Hita Karana* puts man in the center of the equilibrium and the cause of all balance and imbalance. In order for man to achieve the Balinese Hindu goal of *Jagadhita* or happiness and prosperity, he has to achieve balance between and within the three environments. This means adhering to various doctrines and practices within each environment conducive to a harmonious and balanced relationship. In explaining this adherence to those three environments, Drs. Ide Bagus Pujaastawa, lecturer of anthropology at the University of Udayana and Deputy chairman of the Traditional Culture Development and Study Center, eloquently elaborates as follows:

“The *Parahyangan* aspect is an expression of human relations with the spiritual environment, simultaneously being a reflection of human being as a homo religious being This process would give birth to various forms of religious systems, having the function of satisfying the spiritual need of mankind”. As for the *Pawongan* aspect, Pujaastawa continues by saying that it is “an expression of human relationship with each other, reflecting at the same time human beings as social beings in reciprocal and harmonious interactions. Finally, on the *Palemahan* aspect, he explains that “it expresses human relations with their natural environment Arrogance shown by man in exploiting excessively natural resources without considering its preservation reflects a kind of less harmonious interaction of man with the natural environment. Such institutions really reflect ecological wisdom” (Puja Astawa, Ide Bagus, 2003).

3. Research Methodology

This article is an analysis of a compilations of literary researches and articles by a multiplicity of renowned scientists in the field of bio-cultural diversity, ecology, anthropology and ethno science experts such as Maffi, Warren, Slikkerveer, Geertz, Haverkort and Posey. A synthesis has been drawn from these literary reviews as described in this article with various modifications from field verifications. These verifications have been carried out in Bali through panel discussions with heads and members of banjars (village associations) in Gianyar, Jatiluwih, Kerobokan and Ubud. The focus of these panels were on the concept and practices of *Tri Hita Karana*, the Balinese philosophy of life which embodies the cosmovision of the “*Sacred Balance*” in facing the onslaught of globalization through the influx of mass tourism and other elements of modernity.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Globalization and its impact on Bali’s Bio-Cultural Diversity

The ongoing process of globalization through mass tourism in Bali, which has started, the 90’s penetrated virtually into all sectors of society including the economy, agriculture and the mass media. This initially led up to general economic ‘benefits’ such as the growth in commercial enterprises, revived artistic production of souvenirs and extended infrastructures and communication networks. In practice such effects have largely benefited outsiders like non-Balinese hotels, catering middlemen and restaurant managers who came specifically from outside to further develop the tourism industry on the island. Concurrent negative economic implications from the growing tourist industry have later also become manifest in the dramatic increase in costs of living and prices of Balinese land, mainly as result of agricultural plots claimed for construction of hotels, tourist attractions and infrastructures. In this context, Bali also experienced monetary losses following severe fluctuations in the currency exchange rates from the world’s financial markets.

Furthermore, the Balinese landscape, still characterized by the proliferation of religion-based architecture of thousands of temples and shrines carefully laid out amidst traditional rice fields in strict cosmological patterns, is gradually making way for modern development of hotels and resort complexes, albeit yet confined to urban areas. Similarly, concrete factory buildings are also mushrooming on former farming lands, along the road to the hinterlands in complete contradiction not only to traditional principles but also against existing zoning laws. These illegal practices are documented in statistics from the *Provincial Agrarian Office* (2002) which show that not less than 1,000 hectares of fertile agricultural lands are being lost annually to such tourist and industrial facilities over the past decades (*cf.* Bali Post 2002).

This process shows a parallel to the remarkable occupational shift away from agriculture to the tourist industry. Such trend is clearly emerging from the reduction of the contribution of agriculture to Bali’s gross domestic products over the past 30 years until 2019 from around 59% down to 18%, and from a corresponding increase in occupation in tourism from 33.4% up to 65%. This transformation is largely due to the continuing loss of fertile agricultural lands as mentioned above. The reason for this rapid exodus from agriculture to the tourist industry is mainly financial as the current *per capita* income in the tourist profession is more than twice that in the agriculture sector. Such alienation of agricultural lands and abandonment of farmers from their age-long occupation is crucial for the overall understanding of the current transformations on the island from a traditional agrarian-based community to a modern service-oriented society.

Indeed, these tourist developments have resulted in vast clearing of arable lands, illegal logging, expansion of industrial and hotel buildings with real estate growing exponentially accompanied by air pollution and toxic

dumpings. As the island's biota – vital for the survival of its plant and animal species – is being decreased because of these activities, the unique genes, species and ecosystems are directly becoming under threat of extinction. The consequences of this aspect of the globalization process include not only the encroachment of newly-constructed, resorts, office buildings and roads, but as well over consumption of scarce water resources beyond the tourist centres and transformation of traditional, ancestral farm lands and forests to serve the increasing demands of the tourist industry.

These negative impacts at the local level contribute to the threat of biological diversity reduction which poses a pending crisis of great concern among the local population in the village communities throughout the island. In his recent study on tourism and coastal management in Bali, Picard (1992) confirms such negative environmental impacts in coastal regions where pressures from tourist development have led to fragmentation and degradation of the important coastal ecosystems. His study not only shows coastal erosion and deposition processes, but also that mass tourism has led to inequity for the local people in their access to their traditional land and coastal resources, vital for their livelihood.

Today, globalization has come not only to imply the incorporation of the local economy into the global capitalist system, but also its unwanted implications to natural, cultural and spiritual impoverishment of a large part of the local population. The authoritarian economic forces of development have directed the Balinese communities to change and adapt structurally to the 'modern' standards of a more homogeneous pan-Indonesian culture.

With the disappointing results and negative effects of this process over the past few decades, however, the local people have increasingly begun to believe that external administrators, development planners and investors now should start to appreciate the locally well-adapted *Sacred Balance* and to respect the diversity of traditional use and management of resources, and not further ignore the wisdom and experience of indigenous systems of knowledge and practice. In their view, the development-oriented Western philosophies of progress, based on utilitarian, materialistic and capitalist concepts have only advanced the destruction of Bali's biocultural diversity.

The 'cococolisation' of the island which threatens to replace Balinese culture and customs of equity and mutual aid in communal life is beginning to erode traditional values and norms, accompanied by inequality and social disintegration of community life. Mutual help, once provided in the form of voluntary labour, is now increasingly exchanged for service-for-money. This leads to the disappearance of strong fraternal bonds and comradeships which used to be a major part of social life in most villages. With less manpower available, the neighbourhood associations (*banjar*) are now forced to hire outsiders, often non-Balinese, to carry out the communal tasks.

The replacement of these communal tasks also reflects the growing neglect of traditional norms and values as the society is confronted with new ideas and opinions concerning religion and rituals, often creating a state of cognitive dissonance which permeates all aspects of traditional life. All these factors have pertained to a dramatic change in behaviour from one inspired by social symbolism to one that is in quest of individual material pursuits. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fast growing cities throughout Bali which have become magnets for rural inhabitants who seek to aspire a more materialistic way of life. In these urban areas, the elaborate religious ceremonies and communal activities are gradually substituted by simple rituals held at home shrines by a mere handful of the much smaller family units.

As there appears a generally negative impact of globalization in all its dimensions on both bio and cultural diversity of the island, there also emerges a differentiation between the *etic* and *emic* views on the influence of these developments in Bali. On the one hand, the overall *etic* view championed by pro tourist developments refer to Bali as the 'Eden Island' and 'Last Paradise' while the *emic* view the diminishing biocultural resources as an increasingly growing threat to their existence which should be tackled forthwith.

4.2. Tri Hita Karana and Self Sustenance of the Balinese

Within the context of the historical processes of external interaction and internal differentiation of Balinese society, a comparison of *etic* and *emic* views show a marked contrast between an *etic*'s image of a secular, economically-oriented 'Paradise Island', rich with resources prone for global tourism and mega-projects to be developed and exploited, and an *emic*'s self-identification of the Balinese with a long-term sacred, spiritual union between the *visible* and the *invisible* worlds. The negative impacts of globalization on the island's biocultural diversity seems to encompass three major dimensions: economic, cultural and ecological.

However, despite the penetration of the globalization process into related sectors of economic development planning, agriculture, ecosystems and resources, Balinese culture has so far generally been able to resist to a large extent these negative impacts. Various factors seem to have contributed to such position, including not only the eventual implementation of a restricted form of 'cultural tourism' by the regional government authorities but even more so the strong *Hindu Dharma* religion and the Balinese philosophy of life, the strength of local institutions and the adherence to their local management systems. Most remarkable in the continuation of the traditional Balinese way of life is the persistence and transfer of various forms of indigenous knowledge, wisdom, beliefs and

practices. These '*Indigenous Knowledge Systems*' (IKS) in Bali are based on the prevailing local worldview or cosmovision, in which the respect and understanding of the cosmic order, generally perceived of as a tripartite unity of the three worlds - the human world, the spiritual world and the natural world - has formed a guiding principle to create, exchange and use indigenous knowledge and practice for human intervention in nature and its resources.

The negative impacts of the recent process of global development has pertained to the recurrent question - asked by so many visitors, scholars and policy makers - how the Balinese people still have been able to cope and survive these external forces and at the same time have managed to retain their characteristic way of life of non-destructive, if not sustainable use management and conservation of resources up until the present.

For the local Balinese themselves, the answer is clearly encapsulated in their accurate adherence to the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, their philosophy of life, which prescribes strict maintenance of the balance in all elements of the cosmic order through a complex prescribed rituals and ceremonies: a harmonious relationship not only with their fellow humans, but also with nature and the spirits and ancestors. Firmly embedded in the *Hindu Dharma* religion, *Tri Hita Karana* has indeed shown to be less exploitative than most Western, surplus-oriented policies, but guided by a traditional conservation ethic characterized by an environmental consciousness concerning the critical '*Sacred Balance*' with the elements of the cosmos. The contribution of these valuable aspects of indigenous Balinese values to the general preservation of the island - self-evident for the Balinese themselves - has, however, only lately been acknowledged by a relatively small group of outsiders including some visiting scientists, experts and conservationists, such as Hobart, Ramseyer and Leemann (1996); Kagami (2003) and Gerya (2003).

Indeed, the people of Bali tends to regard their strong Balinese religion of *Hindu Dharma* - rather distinct from *Hinduism* in India and Nepal - not only as a faith to follow, but even more so as the ultimate source of their inspirations, their way of life, and, eventually, their survival. It is also providing the magico-religious context for the philosophy of life *Tri Hita Karana* as a spiritual base for the proper guidance of human behaviour towards all three elements of the cosmic order. As *Tri Hita Karana* puts humans as the sole decision makers of their fate, they are able to realize the ultimate Balinese Hindu goal of *jagadhita* and the *Sacred Balance* emphasizing on an harmonious and balanced relationship with the universe and all its elements therein. The cosmic order should be maintained, preserved and if necessary restored throughout life, rendering the primary goal in Balinese life to establish adaptability and harmony with the rest of the world.

The overall impacts of the current globalization process in Bali are in essence becoming problematic. Although a few observers continue to report both an increase in economic benefit from the dominant global tourist industry, albeit largely confined to non-Balinese interest groups and the renaissance of some indigenous traditions in areas such as theatrical performances, concerts, dances and music - largely provoked by tourists who are interested in what MacCannell (1973) called '*staged authenticity*' - its distinct impact on biocultural diversity at community level is generally perceived as negative.

The growing impact of this process on the rich but fragile biocultural diversity at community level in Bali is in the eyes of the local people increasingly negative, specifically in the rural and semi-rural areas of the island, where such impact is now also beginning to affect the traditional way of life and livelihood. Moreover, for an increasing number of Balinese, the advancing external processes of globalization, development planning and mass tourism are causing growing concern and fear that these forces are also beginning to affect their self-identification with their cosmovision of the '*Sacred Balance*' in their relationship with land, life and society, and, in turn, their spiritual source for their ultimate survival. For the Balinese, such threat of losing their philosophy of life which has guided their adaptive interaction with their environment and its resources for many generations could eventually mean that the historical process of maintaining a well-balanced and sustained traditional livelihood system in the island could come to an end.

Fortunately, *Tri Hita Karana* has shown to provide a useful mechanism for the protection and preservation of the Balinese culture and identity. The practical principle of preservation of *Tri Hita Karana* in the light of outside forces of development and change is provided by the adaptive principle of *Desa Kala Patra*. This Balinese principle is based on the concept of adaptation whereby humans are taught the flexibility to tolerate the influx of differences by conforming in terms of place, time and condition: a traditional way to achieve harmony by adapting and learning from changes and as such avoiding small frictions. The practical principle of *Desa Kala Patra* forms the foundation of *Tri Hita Karana* in providing the villagers with a community consciousness of the cosmic unity of all supportive and balanced relations which link humans, land and the forces of nature, generally perceived in a holistic way as an 'extended family'. It is these principal values of balancing between the need to adapt to the challenges of modernity and maintaining harmony with their philosophical beliefs and way of life that have enabled the Balinese to preserve their environment and cultural heritage amidst the impacts of globalization.

Thus, under the current pressure of globalization threatening to seriously degrade or even destroy the substantial biological and cultural diversity of the Balinese, their reaction seems to provoke through their ideological beliefs, a renewed sense of self-determination and self-identity, in particular with regard to the

conservation of their biocultural resources in facing the global challenge.

In the wake of such threat to the position of the Balinese concerning the recognition of their fundamental right to self-determination and self-identity, it is a profound challenge to study, document, analyses and understand the principles and processes currently developing at the community level in response to the forces of globalization in Bali. In such explorative endeavour, the focus should on the one hand be on the factors fostering such community consciousness as taught in *Tri Hita Karana*, and on the other hand on the interaction of the various backgrounds and intervening variables in relation to the conservation behaviour of the Balinese's biocultural diversity as the key concept of their way of life and ultimate survival.

5. Conclusion

Balinese is facing a challenge of mass tourism and modernization which may influence their principle of life. However, their strong root of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and the cosmovision of the *Sacred Balance* of *Tri Hita Karana* emphasizing harmony, adaptability and equilibrium as a philosophy of life of the Balinese can well be the means to thwart the negative impacts of globalization. This philosophy of life provides the islanders behavioral guidelines and a strong sense of identity.

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