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definition rendered not by its peoples but by its governments for political ends, with the energetic involvement of a number of agencies of the state including national tourism organisations (ibid.: 109). Yet governments are working within and responding to both local and global pressures and demands, and a major future challenge for a comparative anthropology is precisely to embrace, within its vision and endeavours, the study of culture at the local, national, and the global levels.

Indonesian Souvenirs as Micro-Monuments to Globalization and Modernity: Hybridization, Deterritorialization and Commodification

Kathleen Adams

I set out to explore Ubud. The reason I chose this town was because in Bali, Ubud is known for its [sic] arts & crafts. And boy, boy, boy, were there a lot of art galleries all over the place. My friend Mike warned me that the art in Bali was amazing, but I had no idea what was ahead of me. Masks, statues of wood & stone, carvings, paintings, what the hell—do any of these people do anything besides create? I felt like a kid in a candy store, and spent the next few days finding all sorts of amazing pieces of art. I managed to max out ALL of my credit cards. I bought so much crap that I had to have it all packed into a giant crate & shipped home by sea freight. When my shop till you drop frenzy finally let up (aka: no more money), I packed my bag and headed for the north coast to a group of seaside villages. . .

(Travel blog posted by a male Californian in his twenties)

As the above post suggests, souvenirs and handicrafts are an intrinsic dimension of Southeast Asian tourism. Few visitors to this region return home without at least one or two local handicrafts or tourist trinkets tucked into the corners of their suitcases. And some visitors, as in the case above, find themselves transformed into frenzied consumers of tourist arts. Likewise, as hinted above, both domestic and foreign tourists’ pursuit of mementos of their Southeast Asian travels has transformed the physical and economic landscapes of the places they visit. Many destinations along the Southeast Asian tourist trail—from Bali to Yogyakarta to Chiang Mai—have emerged as tourist magnets for the acquisition of local arts and handicrafts. In such locales, streets and lanes once lined with homes
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and businesses oriented towards local household consumption needs now host rows of art galleries and tourist shops. Some of these tourist-oriented businesses present museum-like displays of spotlighted `tribal' sculptures and glittering bejeweled items, while others are more akin to bazaar stalls, crammed with handmade baskets, reproductions of antiquities, brilliantly-colored ikat textiles, wooden masks, and other trinkets. In this chapter I suggest that these artistic handicrafts, whether produced by local artisans or by more distant factories, can be productively examined as micro-monuments to modernity, embodying some of the salient characteristics associated with globalization and modernity.

Whereas early academic discussions of souvenirs and tourist-oriented arts tended to dismiss such products as bereft of meaning and value, pioneering work by Nelson Graburn (1976) and Paula Ben-Amos (1977) prompted anthropologists to reassess these assumptions. Ben-Amos's article, 'Pidgin Languages and Tourist Arts', made the compelling argument that souvenirs were more communicative than had previously been assumed and that they should be considered akin to pidgin languages, embodying everyday, often-stereotyped versions of producers' and purchasers' symbolic repertoires. In essence, she pushed for scholars to recognize that touristic trinkets can carry simplified messages between peoples of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Likewise, Graburn's edited volume, Ethnic and Tourist Arts, illustrated not only how different historical circumstances resulted in the emergence of these new artistic forms, but also how a range of meanings were embodied in these `arts of acculturation'. As he and others later helped to illustrate, tourist arts can play a powerful role in sculpting outsiders' images of the places and peoples they are visiting (Graburn, 1976; 1987; Hitchcock and Teague, 2000). In addition, artisans have drawn upon their tourist-oriented arts to renegotiate, or in some cases reaffirm, outsiders' stereotypes of their identity and situation in the world (Graburn, 1976; Adams, 1998a; 2006; Causey, 1999; 2003; Hitchcock and Teague, 2000; Forsee, 2001). Since this pioneering work by Ben-Amos and Graburn, numerous anthropological and sociological studies have explored how souvenirs and commodified arts/handicrafts are directly and indirectly tied to notions of ethnicity, gender, authenticity, and cultural heritage (cf. Cohen, 1983a; 1993; 2000; Stewart, 1993; Shevan-Keller, 1995; Hitchcock and Teague, 2000; Hitchcock, 2003). In this chapter, I draw on some of this prior work as well as my own field research to suggest that handicrafts and material culture found in tourist stalls and markets across Southeast Asia can be seen as material testaments to some of the dynamics of accelerated globalization.

Much has been written about the socio-economic transformations wrought by globalization. Scholars concerned with the arts have tended to concentrate on documenting how global socio-economic interdependence has prompted new trade movements of indigenous arts, reconfigured the value of so-called `tribal arts', or transformed the physi-

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[...]

Building on this work, I draw on examples from Indonesia to show how commoditization, hybridization, and detrimentalization all features associated with globalization and modernity are part and parcel of much of the material culture produced for sale to tourists.

Before turning to discuss specific Indonesian tourist-oriented arts, a brief survey of the terrain of globalization theory is necessary. Whereas early discussions of globalization tended to posit cultural homogenization as a leitmotif of globalization, more recent analysts have rejected this claim (cf. Robertson, 1994; Tomlinson, 1999). As numerous scholars, like the Dutch sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2003), have recently argued, a more common dynamic of globalization is what has been referred to as cultural `hybridization'. For Nederveen Pieterse, hybridization can be thought of as a `global cultural mélange' or `global cultural interplay' (1993: 9), involving a mixing and merging of cultural forms from diverse locales. Homi Bhabha's writings also discuss hybridity, although his emphasis is on hybrid identities rather than art forms. His work underscores how hybridity is an area of tension produced by splits between two cultures in colonial contexts, as well as the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities (1994: 112). The notion of cultural hybridization shares some terrain with the concept of `globalization', pioneered by Roland Robertson (1995), among others. As an amalgamation of the terms `globalization' and `localization', the expression is said to be derived from the Japanese business term for adjusting global products for specific local markets. According to Shinji Yamashita (2003b: 6), the term derives from the Japanese word dochakuka, which translates as `living on one's own land', and initially was used to describe adjusting one's agricultural techniques to local conditions. In recent years, a number of anthropologists have embraced this concept in their analyses of tourism dynamics (cf. Raz, 1999; Yamashita, 2003b; Nesse, 2003). In many cases, today's tourist arts of Southeast Asia are hybridized and globalized, as I will illustrate shortly.

As with hybridization, detrimentalization has also been spotlighted as an important cultural dimension of globalization (cf. Tomlinson, 1999). According to Mexican theorist Nestor Garcia Canclini, detrimentalization is the loss of the `natural' relation of culture to geographical and social territories (2001). Ulricke Schuerkens defines this process as a kind of restructuring of space that entails the disappearance of fixed links of human beings to towns, villages and national frontiers (2003: 212). As Schuerkens declares, `spatial distances [now] include the world as a space' (Schuerkens, 2003: 212). In Southeast Asia today, as the examples that follow will show, cultural products sold to tourists embody this dimension of globalization as well.

Before proceeding to the ethnographic illustrations, a caveat is necessary. In arguing that we can productively approach Southeast Asian tourist trinkets as mini-monuments to a contemporary post-modern world in which travel, displacement and
commodification are salient themes, it is important to underscore earlier observations, made by Anthony Reid (1988; 1993; 1994), Foxshe, Fink and Care (1999) and others, regarding long-term dynamics in Southeast Asia. As these authors have compellingly illustrated, travel and the inter-regional marketing of local products are deeply-rooted and ancient traditions in Southeast Asia, although, as Reid has observed, 'Southeast Asia was not 'discovered' by world trade systems' until more recently (1984: 268, cited in Foxshe, 1999: 2). In short, the selling of material culture and handicrafts to tourists is not as recent a phenomenon as has been imagined. However, with the ease and affordability of travel brought by jumbo jets and charter flights, as well as with the projection of material images of destination handicrafts on the internet, the marketing and elaboration of Southeast Asian handicrafts have expanded dramatically. In the course of this recent expansion, then, Southeast Asian touristic trivialities have come to embody many of the key themes of the post-modern global world.

I now turn to embark on a whirlwind tour of some of the souvenirs emerging from parts of Indonesia. Like all tours, this one tends to favour certain destinations. This chapter concentrates primarily on examples from Tana Toraja, in upland South Sulawesi. However, I also make occasional, brief comparisons to work done by other scholars elsewhere in the region (including the Toba Bakar region of Sumatra, the Eastern Indonesian island of Sumba, and East Timor). Since the 1980s, my research has concentrated on art, tourism and identity in the Toraja highlands, hence my focus on examples from this area. However, it is clear from the work of other scholars in other parts of Southeast Asia (cf. Cohen, 2000; Foxshe, 2001; Caussey, 2003) that the dynamics chronicled here are also relevant to the societally commoditized arts of other regions of Southeast Asia.

Tourism and Commoditized Arts in Upland Sulawesi, Indonesia

Hailed as the 'second tourist stop after Bali', the Sula Toraja homeland of upland Sulawesi attracted growing numbers of international and domestic tourists in the 1980s and 1990s. Whereas in 1972 only 650 foreigners visited the Toraja highlands, by the mid-1990s over 250,000 tourists were traveling to Tana Toraja annually. However, in 1998, when Indonesia plunged into a period of political and economic unrest, only 24,620 foreign tourists and 38,187 domestic tourists visited the region. In the post-September 11th world, ongoing Muslim-Christian violence in certain areas of Indonesia and the infamous October 2002 Bali discotheque bombing took a further toll on Toraja tourism. However, Toraja entrepreneurs have not let the plummet in foreign tourist visits inhibit their promotion of their homeland and its artistic produce: the internet sports multiple Toraja web-sites offering carved Toraja handicrafts and imitation Toraja antiquities for sale to those who are inclined to remain in their armchairs at home (Adams, 2000). Thirty-five years ago, carved Toraja

kindred houses (songkhasan) and sculpted Toraja effigies of the dead (sau-tau) were known only to Indonesians, anthropologists and missionaries. Today no Southeast Asia travel log is without at least a paragraph devoted to the Toraja and their ritual and material culture. As a Sunset article declared, 'Here [in Tana Toraja] you can get an anthropologist's glimpse of an ancient culture, fantastic building styles, unusual burial customs and possibly witness a festive funeral' (Holdtman, 1985). Through tourism, travel shows and internet promotion, then, these images have rapidly become international icons of a seductively exotic culture. For many tourists, the purchase of a miniature carved ancestral house, a wall plaque sporting incised Toraja motifs, or an imitation Toraja effigy of the dead represents not only a physical momento of travel experiences, but also a physical embodiment of assorted ideas about the 'Other'.
The explosion of tourism in the 1980s and 1990s and the attendant commodification of Toraja material culture have coloured the relationship between the Toraja and their material products, most notably their effigies of the dead (wasu-taus) [see Figure 3.1]. Brochures and posters issued by the Indonesian Office of Tourism, as well as popular guidebooks, all feature images of Toraja burial cliffs and effigies of the dead. For those Torajans who continue to practice Toraja traditional religion (kadek to daloi), the wasu-taus is thought to be inhabited by the spirits of the particular ancestor it represents. In exchange for periodic offerings, the spirit offers protection from ill. For Torajans, these effigies are also closely associated with noble identity, since only elite Torajans were traditionally permitted to have sculpted wooden effigies at their funerals. However, for foreign visitors, wasu-taus soon became haunting symbols of pan-Toraja identity and animism. By the 1980s local carvers had begun accommodating the tourist interest in these effigies. Some started sculpting miniature, stylized wasu-taus, dressed in bits of well-worn sarong fabric. Others experimented with suitcase-sized carvings of burial cliffs, complete with small balconies holding troll-like effigies. Still others began to make what has become known as patung model Bali (Balinese-styled sculptures), small doll-sized sculptures of Toraja villagers' types [see Figure 3.2].

Figure 3.2: Doll-sized tourist carvings of Toraja ‘village types’

Lolo was one of the first Kete' Kasten carvers I knew to recognize the potential income to be had from carving fake effigies. After years of working on Java, Lolo returned to the Kete' Kasten area in the early 1980s and decided to try his hand at carving. He was inspired by a tour guide who had arrived at Kete' Kasten wanting to buy a statue (effigy). Over the next decade he and the two assistants he had trained sculpted dozens of statues and fake wasu-taus, many of which were purchased by tourists. Such were his skills that he has even been hired to sculpt two wasu-taus for American museums. As Lolo did not have a family to support, he worked sporadically, largely to support his passion for cock-fighting. Despite his earnest involvement in carving, Lolo devoted much energy to creating authentic-looking weathered patinas for the effigies he and his assistants carved. In the late 1980s I would occasionally come upon Lolo and his assistants splattering their carvings with a mixture of palm-wine and rice grains, then turning their roommates loose to peck at them. On other days I would find them pouring urine on their sculptures. To further accelerate the aging process, they would bury them for several weeks. Their carvings emerged looking suitably haunting and were often sold in the family’s touristic stall or in the art shops in town.

Lolo is not the only carver crafting such tourist treasures. Today, miniature hunch-backed men with cane, sturdy youths tugging pigs, roughly hewn elders caddying cockerels, and old women bearing funeral offerings all crowd the shelves of local tourist shops. While domestic Indonesian tourists rarely purchase these sorts of souvenirs (possibly due to Islam’s distillation to represent human form), these sculptures tend to spark the interest of foreign tourists. Even more intriguing to these tourists are the carved reproductions of grave-related antigaties, which they could fancy to be authentic. Ironically, tourism’s showcasing of the Toraja not only promoted the wasu-tau an emblem of generalized Toraja identity (rather than personal elite identity), but also played a role in transforming the wasu-taus from a ritually significant entity into a commodified art object of economic significance.

By the 1980s, a wave of wasu-taus thefts plagued the Toraja highlands. Since that time, hundreds of wasu-taus have been stolen and sold to European, American and Asian art collectors. Burial cliffs once crowded with effigies were pillaged, leaving local villagers anguish and perplexed. At some burial sites frequented by tourists, the Indonesian government has funded the carving of replacement effigies of the dead, prompting local controversy. At other sites, villagers have enclosed their remaining wasu-taus in cliff-side cages to assure against further thefts. Despite international repatriation laws, suppressing the drain of wasu-taus to Europe, the United States and Canada seems a hopeless matter, particularly in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s and the political turbulence that has followed. As prices for basic goods spiralled and tourism dwindled to a trickle, economic desperation inspired new thefts. In addition, the nation’s political instability and inter-ethnic violence rendered pursuit of wasu-taus smugglers a low priority. As the Torajas continued, there are obstacles to stemming the flow of effigies to the West at every level—international, national and local. International art dealers assert that the
azau-comm they sell were 'legally acquired', and those azau-comm that are recovered frequently become entwined in lengthy legal processes. Stolen effigies that are acquired before leaving Indonesia often end up languishing in police warehouses, where they become 'evidence' awaiting the capture and trial of the thieves. And at the local level Toraja are also reluctant to reclaim their stolen azau-comm, as returning them to their graves requires traditional religious rituals that many Christian Toraja are reluctant to undertake, as well as the installation of new security systems. Both of these courses of action may be difficult for a person in need of a source of income. Thus a number of the azau-comm that have been recovered continue to reside in crowded police warehouses.

Today, the Toraja's relationship to the azau-comm has gone full circle: once 'protected' by these effigies, Toraja now find themselves in the reluctant role of azau-comm guardians. The Toraja experience is emblematic of the changing relationship between ethnic groups and their sacred art in other parts of Southeast Asia. Paul Michael Taylor's edited volume Fragile Traditions: Indonesian Art in Jeopardy (1994) chronicles parallel trends elsewhere in Indonesia. Likewise, a recent thought-provoking article by Jill Forsher discusses tourists' and international connoisseurs' collecting of stolen objects of value from Eastern Indonesia and East Timor in the 1998–2002 period (2002). In discussing stolen sculptural figures from East Timor and Sumba that made their way to tourist shops in Kupang, Bali and Jakarta, she observes that 'images of "vicious" societies perpetuate a peculiar type of international value attached to art, from image-charged places like Oceania or Africa, or from historical head-hunting societies in Sumba and Timor' (Forsher, 2002: 69). Elaborating on this increasing flow of often sacred collectible cultural objects to Indonesian tourist market centers, Forsher further reflects:

I imagined that this commerce was fueled by tragedy, finding an outlet in an international demand for what were in truth spoils of war. Undercutting this market was an amping sense of moral violence that communally produced charred or partially destroyed objects that endowed the tales pitches of traders of art. Baru showed me much the same thing. I began to think about the motivations of shops catering to tourists in Bali, hundreds of miles to the west of Timor Island. (Forsher, 2002: 73)

As examples from Tana Toraja, Sumba, East Timor and elsewhere suggest, as Southeast Asian ethnic arts become increasingly commodified and covered by tourist and international collectors, their sacred value competing with their new economic value, more and more groups will find themselves becoming guardians of the spiritually potent creations that once promised protection. In essence, the process of commodification of spiritual arts has dramatically transformed both insiders' and outsiders' perceptions of these material objects.
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By 1996 souvenir shops in Ranepam not only sold Bugis-made Toraja trinkets, but souvenirs with Toraja motifs produced by foreigners or manufactured in Javanese factories. Javanese factories had vastly expanded and now included sophisticated reproductions of sengkanyo motifs and Palembang-looking stick-figure warriors inspired by designs from batik manufacturers. Although bearing phrases such as 'Toraja Primitive', many of these T-shirts are produced in the silk-screening ateliers of foreign graphic artists residing elsewhere in the province. As with the Bugis-made silver sengkanyo necklaces, these 'foreign-made' imitation clothes prompt various Toraja responses. While some young Torajas wear them proudly, unconcerned by their origins, others are more reluctant to embrace them.

As a case in point, a lively mid rushes Toraja midwife I knew delighted in wearing eye-catching cargo pants fashioned from green cotton cloth covered with small, traditionally coloured Toraja designs. When I admired the pants, she explained that a Javanese doctor who had been working in Tan Toraja for a number of years had 'invented' the new line of Toraja pants. Now manufactured at a factory on the island of Java, the pants are transported back to Sulawesi and sold in her parent's souvenir stall at a Toraja grave site frequented by tourists as well as in Ranepam touristic shops. My friend stood in front of me playfully modeling the pants, while I read the words displayed on the large exterior pocket tag out loud: 'Bugis [clothing] Collection TORAJA'. Joining us, my Toraja research assistant smiled and dismissively declared, 'Those are made by a person from Java, not Toraja!' Turning to the midwife, he teased her for being so 'dumb' as to buy a Javanese-manufactured product masquerading as something Toraja. A month later, when it came time for me to return to the United States, my Toraja midwife friend tucked a familiar pair of the pants into my arms as a farewell present. With a sly smile, she noted that in the United States no one would give me a hard time for wearing these pants. My research assistant, who was present, remained silent. A few days later, however, he presented me with a striking black dress shirt. The shirt featured carefully executed traditional Toraja paling (water buffalo) designs drawn from house carvings. 'The Javanese will be mad when they see that shirt', he quipped. 'Now we Toraja are making batik shirts like the Javanese, but replacing their patterns with our own! Soon we'll be selling them in Jakarta!'

When I left Tan Toraja a few days later, my encounters with decontextualized cultural practices and appropriations of cultural iconography and designs had not ended. While waiting in Makasar airport, I wandered over to a souvenir shopping island topped with a Bugis-styled roof. As I scanned the small portable goods to be offered for the last-minute shopper, my eyes settled on a glass case filled with what looked, on first glance, like the tiny Persian worry dolls sold to tourists in Latin America (see Figure 3.4). Arranged in neat clusters were barrettes and pins of various sizes, each adorned with rows of squinty-faced dolls. Their minuscule heads were crafted of balsa wood, each wearing a small, triangular black cotton bow. The dolls were clad in brightly coloured Bugis silk. I called the young Bugis attendant over for assistance...
and asked her about these new creations. As she explained, 'They are from Toraja and have to do with dead people... You see, in Toraja they put the dead in cliffs. There are those things they make that look like the dead people...'. Realizing she meant that these Peruvian-inspired items were intended to depict tai-si, I asked why they were dressed in Bugis silks and not Toraja cloth. Whereupon I learned that they were made by lowland Bugis and not Toraja artisans.

The pins were a triumph in hybridity, using a Peruvian souvenir form and classic Bugis silks to showcase tai-si, a Toraja form. As discussed earlier, in recent years a number of scholars have explored the concept of hybridity. Edward Said, among others, has developed the concept in his book "Culture and Imperialism" (1993), which underlines the role of colonialism, and more recently migration, in fostering hybrid identities. For Said, the contemporary conduits of hybridity are often migrants. I suggest that a slightly different form of temporary migrants—international tourists—are often the conduits of artistic/tribal hybridity, along with print and electronic media. Indonesian international travellers, both actual tourists and those who surf the Web, draw inspiration from...
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In still other cases, a closer examination of Southeast Asian tourist-oriented arts offers testimony to the process of de-territorialization, with certain objects embodying distant chains of production and distribution. As we have seen via the examples presented here, Southeast Asian tourist objects offer testimony to the broader dynamics of globalization. In essence, they are micro-monuments to modernity.

Notes

1 Downloaded on February 1, 2005 from people.tribe.net/ambole/blog/ctopic14-016749-2-541-417-9eb11-34610395602.

2 Over 75 per cent of these tourists were domestic. These tourism statistics derive from the Badan Pertual Statistik in Tana Toraja Regency. Government tourism officials calculate these figures by comparing the number of tourist tickets sales at the most popular tourist sites with occupancy rates and guest logs at local hotels, inns and home stays (Rombelepau, personal communication, August 15, 1995). It is probable that the number of domestic tourism is slightly inflated, as many Toraja residing outside the homeland regularly return for family visits and funeral rituals. While in Tana Toraja Regency, they often visit the more celebrated tourist villages to purchase trinkets for friends back home. Some of these returning family members also prefer to stay at local hotels. For an exploration of the factors and dynamics underlying domestic tourism visits to Tana Toraja, see Adams (1998b).

3 See Simmons and Naurambah (2000).

4 For a rich analysis of tourists' pursuit of 'real' souvenirs of their travels amid the ambivalences conjured up by fakes, see Causer (2003).

5 For more information, see Adams (1993) and Crystal (1994).

6 Indonesian government laws decree that objects more than fifty years old be banned from export, unless they have been evaluated for their cultural and historical criticality (see Direktorat Perlindungan dan Penelitian Penelitian Sejarah dan Purbakala, 1993).

7 I thank Jill Powher for alerting me to the latest trends in Kuta. As she observes, these cave-man-like creatures bear no resemblance to any Indonesian people whatsoever (personal communication, January 30, 2006).

8 For a fascinating chronicle of a similar process in Mexico, see Chibnall (2003). Chibnall's book details the origins of the colorful Oaxacan carved wood figures, chronicling how this distinctive folk art is not actually a Zapotec Indian product (despite claims that it is), but rather was invented by non-Indian Mexican artisans for the tourist market.


Terrorism and Tourism in Bali and Southeast Asia

I Nyoman Darma Putra and Michael Hitchcock

Introduction

Michel Houellebecq's controversial novel Platform (2002) manages to combine a lurid account of sex tourism with a horrific terrorist attack in Thailand. The book's protagonist Michel, who coincidentally bears the same first name as the author, falls in love with Valerie, an employee of a struggling tour company. On their return to Paris they embark on a love affair in which Michel persuades Valerie and her boss to devote their company's hotels in Thailand and the Caribbean to sex tourism. The new package holidays prove to be popular, especially with Germans, portrayed in the book as stupid and uncultured. One of Michel's characteristics is his rabid and senseless hatred of various 'other' (e.g., Germans, pork butchers and Protestants), but Muslims are the villains of the story, murderers of Michel's father and his mistress. While Michel's thoughts turn to domesticity and babies, young men with turbans—Muslim terrorists—blow Valerie and the hotel's prostitutes and their customers to bits. Whatever the merits of the book, which was originally published in French in 1999, the author is eerily prescient about how tourist resorts could become terrorism targets in Southeast Asia.

Houellebecq may be concerned with "Thailand, which, although it has suffered attacks on nightclubs and centres of entertainment, has not experienced the same level of terrorist violence as other Southeast Asian countries, notably the Philippines. There the militant Islamic group Abu Sayyaf took 21 hostages, including 10 foreign tourists, from a diving resort in the Malaysian state of Sabah. The kidnap earned Abu Sayyaf US$ 20 million, reportedly paid by Libya (Rabban, 2003: 54)."
Chapter 6

Museum/City/Nation: Negotiating Identities in Urban Museums in Indonesia and Singapore

Kathleen M. Adams

Introduction: Museums as “Cathedrals of Urban Modernity”

A recently published volume on the history of museums in Europe poetically heralds museums as “cathedrals of urban modernity” (Lorente 1998). Like cathedrals, the author observes, museums are an essentially urban phenomenon. “If the existence of a cathedral-church

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1This chapter was originally presented at the 1999 “City as Text” conference in Singapore which was sponsored by the National University of Singapore’s Centre for Advanced Studies. I wish to express my gratitude to the National University of Singapore and the Centre for Advanced Study for the Isaac Menasheh Meyer Fellowship which made the research possible. I am particularly grateful to Robbie Goh and Ho Kiong Chong for their support and stimulating conversations while I was at the Centre for Advanced Studies, as well as to Martheth Esh, Ray Mothilal, Brenda Yee, Tohng Leng Leng and Ryn Blahop. Interactions with scholars at the Centre for Advanced Study greatly enriched this project, the shortcomings of which rest solely on my shoulders. I also wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the museum personnel and administrators who generously shared their time, thoughts and observations with me. Among others, I especially wish to thank Kenso Kwok, Kow Kian Chow, Leonard Nalub, Ibu Subardini, and Intan Mardiana. I am also grateful to the American Philosophical Society for a grant that supported the Indonesian portion of this research in 1996.
was in medieval [European] times, one of the defining criteria to distinguish between a ‘city’ and a ‘town,’ the provision of public museums became, from the Enlightenment onwards, one of the most typical urban features” (Lorentz 1998: 1). These parallels between museums and cathedrals, I suggest, extend beyond their shared status as markers of a (Western) metropole. Museums and cathedrals are not only indices of urban landscapes: both are sites for the dissemination of authoritative texts or scripts for viewing the world. Moreover, both signal entrée into imagined transnational communities.

My concern in this chapter is not so much with cathedrals in relation to these issues, but with museums. As Carol Duncan has noted, fine arts museums have long been regarded in the West as “fixtures of a well-furnished state” (1994: 278). Beyond conveying urbanicity, the establishment of art museums communicates engagement with national and international audiences. Duncan suggests that this perspective on museums has been embraced in other parts of the world: “Western style art museums are now deployed as a means of signalling to the West that one is a reliable political ally, imbued with the proper respect for and adherence to Western symbols and values” (Ibid. 1994: 278). While one may question the Eurocentric dimensions of Duncan’s assertions concerning non-Western nations’ adoption of art museums to convey “adherence to Western symbols and values,” her recognition of the political role of these museums is astute. In broad terms, this chapter addresses the political dimension of urban state-run museums in Southeast Asia. More specifically, my interest here is in examining urban, state-run museums as artfully-constructed texts for the rehearsal of various identities, be they metropolitan, pat-provincial, national, regional or transnational. Additionally, I seek to go beyond textual readings of these museums’ displays and structures, to examine the ways in which various museum visitors, guides, and even staff, rewrite and recontextualize the narratives with which they are presented. My focus is on ethnographic or cultural museums, and not on art museums, as I believe that the differences between these genres of museums warrant conceptual separation (although similar dynamics may well occur in both).

The observations presented here are based on field research conducted in Indonesia and Singapore in 1996, 1998 and 1999. This research incorporated participant observation, persual of government documents pertaining to museums, as well as interviews with museum personnel, guides, educators, museum visitors and museum-avoiders. The interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, in particular, suggests a complex array of identity issues under negotiation in and around urban Southeast Asian museums. As entrée into these issues, I offer the following vignette which silhouettes some of the themes at the heart of this chapter.

Gazes of the Nation: The Central Museum in Jakarta

The Central Museum in Jakarta occupies a prominent residence in a stately white-washed colonial building at one end of Freedom Plaza, in the administrative heart of Indonesia’s capital city. Popularly dubbed “gadung gajah” (Elephant Building) in homage to the carved stone elephant statue adorning the museum’s front lawn, an 1871 gift from Thailand’s Chulalongsorn, the museum’s colonial exterior and decorative statuary testify to historical and international ties. As befits Indonesia’s premier ethnographic and historical museum, on a typical morning the front parking lot is cluttered with tour-laden taxis, buses bearing Indonesian students and vendors hawking snacks and souvenir postcards. The cool darkened interior of the Central Museum contrasts sharply with its bright bustling exterior. In the entry lobby, multilingual volunteer guides linger alongside solemn guards and weary tourists. Traffic flows out of the lobby and into the museum’s spacious orienting gallery, where visitors encounter their first museum display: three enormous number-coded maps of the provinces and regencies of Indonesia. Framing each of these maps are dozens of small oil paintings, each depicting a face representative of a different ethnic group from Indonesia’s provinces and regencies (Fig. 1). Painted in 1930 for the museum (which was then a Dutch colonial establishment), these hypnotic portraits of traditionally