CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN INDONESIA

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Introduction

This paper attempts to describe the conservation of cultural diversity in Indonesia. Indonesia consists of more than 13,000 islands. Each island has its own culture and tradition. The penetration of Hindu-Buddhism, Islam and Christianity have created heritage and cultural diversity in Indonesia. The heritage and traditions of Hindu-Buddhism occur in the western part of Indonesia including Sumatra, Java and Bali. However, they do not exist in the eastern part of Indonesia. Unlike Hindu and Buddhism, Islam and Christianity have penetrated throughout the major part of Indonesia.

Besides the impact of these four major religions, local tradition or ‘prehistoric’ cultural elements also still exist in several ethnic groups and islands, such as in the islands of Nias, Sumba, Timor and Irianjaya. The government of Indonesia is fully aware of the existence of cultural diversity in Indonesia. It is stated on the national symbol, a mystical bird of Garuda Pancasila, in a phrase: Bhineka Tunggai Ika which means ‘unity in diversity’.

In order to strengthen and enrich national culture the Government of Indonesia protects and preserves local tradition and culture which it believes to be relevant to national values. It is also stated in the Guide Lines for National Development that local languages are to be maintained and preserved for the enrichment of the National Language (Bahasa Indonesia) (GBHN, 1993-1998: 95). These government strategies have been implemented through the curriculum of Preliminary and High Schools which are known as local Supplementary Curriculum.

Preserving and Promoting Local Culture

The Indonesian government encourages the younger generation to study and understand their local or regional culture. This program has been implemented by the Department of Education and Culture through curriculum for preliminary, secondary and high school. In addition to national curriculum, local language and culture have been taught from preliminary to high school. It is believed that an appreciation and understanding of local culture will ultimately strengthen and enrich national culture.

Youth exchange programs could be another strategy to increase appreciation and understanding among younger people of their own and other cultures; such a program may also be useful in enhancing a sense of national identity among the same group.

As well as education programs there is also currently a trend in Indonesia that each province holds culture or art festivals. Since 1978 the local government of Bali has held the Bali Art Festival. This event is normally held during school holidays (mid June to mid-July) every year. The Bali Art Festival involves the participation of other provinces of Indonesia, as well as countries such as Japan and America.

The aim of this festival is not only to increase appreciation and understanding among the Balinese about their culture but also to preserve and promote Balinese culture. The theme of the Bali Art Festival is always related to national issues. Art festivals are also held by other provinces, such as North Sumatra and Central Java.

Art festivals for other regions in Indonesia might be a good way to preserve and promote local culture; they will increase the understanding of local people about their culture which in turn will ultimately enrich the national cultural understanding.

Conservation of Archaeological Remains and Sites

According to Lipe (1984) archaeological remains and sites have symbolic, aesthetic, economic and informational value. These artefacts and ecofacts need to be preserved for present and future generations.

The preservation and maintenance of structures, objects and sites from the past has been practised in Indonesia since the colonial period. The regulation was stated in the Monument Ordinance Number 19, 1931, and it was then modified in 1934 as Monument Ordinance Number 21, 1934 (Indonesia Legislation on National Heritage 1992).

These regulations have now been renewed and modified and are known as Legislation Number 5, 1992 on National Heritage (Undang-undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 5 Tahun 1992 tentang Benda Cagar Budaya). It states that movable or non-movable artefacts, as well as ecofacts which are at least 50 years old, representing a certain style or site have to be protected and preserved (UU RI No.5, 1992:2-4).
According to Legislation Number 5, 1992, artefacts which are categorised as National Heritage belong to the State or Government. However, in certain circumstances individuals or private organisations are allowed to have possession of artefacts which are part of the National Heritage, for example, private collections of artefacts which have been in the possession of a family for many generations.

National Heritage can be used for social, scientific and tourism purposes. In Article Number 26 of the Legislation Number 5, 1992, it is stated that anyone who destroys, takes, moves or changes artefacts which are categorised as National Heritage will be punished by ten years in jail or fined one hundred million rupiah. Research relating to National Heritage items requires the permission of the Government. Anybody who undertakes a search for National Heritage artefacts without government permission will be punished by five years in jail or fined fifty million rupiah. Legislation Number 5, 1992 is still being socialised. It will be useful for conservation and preserving cultural remains from the past.

Problems and Prospects

Conservation programs relating to cultural diversity in Indonesia raise some problems. These difficulties are a consequence of the extensive area and the large variety of culture which needs to be preserved in Indonesia. In developing countries like Indonesia funding is always a major problem for cultural conservation programs. Alongside the lack of funding, expertise can also be scarce.

The most crucial problem in relation to cultural conservation programs is a lack of public awareness of, and responsibility for, Cultural Heritage items. For instance, some artefacts which can be categorised as National Heritage have been sold by the owners to antique collectors. In addition, several archaeological sites have been looted for economic purposes.

Commercialisation and secularisation of culture and traditions are also major issues in developing countries - particularly in relation to tourism.

In order to solve these problems, the Government should set some priorities, such as increasing public awareness about culture and material remains from the past. These program can be pursued through formal or informal education. The second step that needs to be taken is to select and set priorities as to which parts of cultural or archaeological remains from the past should be preserved and conserved.

Public awareness of culture and National Heritage may be a good strategy for encouraging donations to be directed into the preservation and conservation of cultural items.

As well as national funding, international funding from organisations such as UNESCO is still needed by countries like Indonesia.

Cultural diversity in Indonesia is a national asset. It encourages a national pride and is important to national identity. In relation to tourism, culture and National Heritage items in Indonesia provide a contribution to the Indonesian economy.

Appreciation and understanding of local culture, which is the basis of national culture, are very important in Indonesia. This can be achieved through formal and informal education. Funding and expertise are other factors which support the success of the program.

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