

Governance of Traditional Arts in Bali from a Historical Perspective Art

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ABSTRACT

Traditional art in Bali is a dynamic cultural system and has developed over the centuries through continuous interaction between religious, social and political influences. From an art historical perspective, Balinese art forms—such as sacred dance, gamelan music, sculpture, painting, and ritual performances—not only act as aesthetic expressions, but also as manifestations of spiritual devotion, communal identity, and the socio-political order of Balinese society. This article examines how the governance of traditional arts in Bali developed from the classical Hindu-Balinese kingdom, the Dutch colonial period, Indonesian independence, to the contemporary era marked by globalization and mass tourism. This study uses a historical-cultural approach with literature analysis and contextual interpretation, to explore the role of traditional institutions—such as *banjar*, *Pakraman* villages, palaces, and temples—in regulating the production, inheritance, and performance of art based on customary law and religious values. In addition, this article examines how the role of artists underwent a transformation: from ritual servants working for temples and kingdoms, to cultural actors who had to adapt to modern markets and state policies. The results of the study show that even though external forces such as tourism, commodification and state intervention have encouraged innovation as well as the fragmentation of traditional values, the core principles of Balinese art are still maintained through governance that originates from local wisdom. However, the sustainability of traditional Balinese art increasingly depends on inclusive and community-based governance models, which are able to balance the preservation of authenticity and the need for cultural adaptation. This article emphasizes the importance of reflecting traditional Balinese art within the framework of cultural preservation, education and public policy so that it remains alive and relevant for future generations.

KEYWORDS

Balinese traditional art, art history, cultural governance, traditional institutions, heritage preservation, ritual and aesthetics, tourism and identity



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Introduction

Traditional Balinese art has long been recognized as an essential component of Indonesia's cultural identity and as an internationally acknowledged cultural icon. Various forms of artistic expression—such as sacred dances, gamelan performances,

wood carving, traditional painting, and ritual arts—are deeply rooted in the Hindu-Balinese spiritual system, customary social order, and local cosmology [1]. These art forms function not merely as aesthetic expressions but as integral elements of religious life and collective belief systems. Historically, the development of Balinese traditional art has been shaped by political transformations, religious dynamics, and interactions with external cultures, from ancient Indian influences and the Majapahit era to Dutch colonialism, modern tourism, and globalization [2].

Traditionally, arts governance in Bali has been carried out through a customary-religious system in which *banjar*, *pakraman* villages, and temples play a central role in regulating artistic activities. This collective governance model operates rhythmically following ceremonial calendars and religious cycles [3]. However, since the twentieth century, the growth of cultural tourism and increasing state intervention through cultural preservation policies have significantly altered this governance structure. Art forms that were once strictly sacred and bound to ritual contexts have experienced functional shifts, profanization, and commodification, particularly through tourist-oriented performances [4].

These transformations have generated several crucial issues. First, tensions have emerged between the preservation of traditional sacred values and the economic demands of the tourism industry. Second, the social role of artists has shifted from ritual servants within religious systems to creative workers operating within a market-oriented cultural economy. Third, issues of legitimacy, authority, and control have arisen as traditional institutions increasingly share or compete governance roles with the state, private stakeholders, and global cultural actors. Although many studies have examined Balinese art and tourism, systematic discussions on the historical transformation of traditional arts governance remain limited.

This article aims to analyze the historical evolution of traditional arts governance in Bali from the royal period to the contemporary era. It focuses on the roles of key actors, including traditional institutions, artists, the state, and the cultural market. Using an interdisciplinary approach combining art history, cultural anthropology, and cultural policy studies, this study also seeks to identify effective community-based governance models for sustaining the continuity and authenticity of traditional Balinese art amid the pressures of modernization and globalization.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a historical-cultural perspective to explore and understand the dynamics of traditional arts governance in Bali across different historical periods. This approach is considered appropriate for tracing historical processes and examining transformations in cultural values and social

practices within local communities [5]. Art is interpreted not only as an aesthetic object but also as a representation of social, political, and spiritual systems.

The type of research used is descriptive-analytical. Cultural facts are described in-depth and subsequently analyzed within relevant theoretical frameworks to identify patterns, relationships, and transformations in arts governance. The main sources of data include cultural narratives, community practices, and historical documentation. Supporting data are obtained from previous scholarly studies, policy documents, and ethnographic records.

Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how traditional Balinese art has been managed, transmitted, and preserved within changing socio-cultural contexts, as well as how traditional values persist amid external economic, political, and cultural pressures.

Results and Discussion

1. Evolution of Traditional Arts Governance in Historical Trajectory

The governance of traditional arts in Bali has undergone significant transformation alongside shifts in political authority and socio-cultural structures. During the royal period, traditional arts—particularly dance, gamelan, and painting—functioned primarily as ritual media supported and protected by the palace under a patronage system [6]. Artists created works mainly for religious ceremonies and royal rituals, positioning art as a sacred practice rather than an economic commodity.

Following the colonial period and Indonesian independence, cultural authority gradually decentralized. The role of the palace in art regulation declined and was increasingly taken over by traditional community institutions such as *banjar* and *pakraman* villages. Field observations in several villages, including Batuan, show that ritual practices such as *ngayah* (voluntary temple service through art) remain central to arts governance. However, these practices are now integrated with commercial artistic activities, particularly tourist performances, indicating a hybridization of sacred and economic functions.

2. Role of Traditional and Community Institutions in Arts Governance

Traditional institutions continue to serve as the main actors in maintaining the continuity of traditional arts. In all research locations, *banjar* plays a central role in organizing art training, rehearsals, and performances for both ceremonial and social purposes. Artistic activities are not managed individually but through a communal system based on mutual cooperation and collective responsibility [7].

Nevertheless, the sustainability of this model faces substantial challenges. Younger generations in several regions show decreasing participation in traditional arts due to economic pressures, lifestyle changes, and the attraction of alternative professions outside the arts sector. This condition demonstrates that although customary-based governance structures formally remain, their social strength has begun to erode under the influence of modern socio-economic dynamics.

3. Transformation of the Role of Artists and the Function of Art

This research also reveals a significant transformation in the role of artists. Traditionally embedded within religious and ritual systems, artists now also function as creative economic actors who must adapt to market demands, especially in tourism centers such as Ubud. Artists no longer serve solely in spiritual contexts but also in commercial cultural packages for tourists.

This transformation creates a dilemma between the preservation of sacred values and economic survival. Several informants stated that sacred dance forms are often modified to suit tourist preferences, such as shortening performance durations or reducing ritual elements to emphasize entertainment. This reflects an ongoing process of profanization and commodification of traditional art, as described by Picard [4], as an inevitable consequence of cultural tourism development.

4. State Intervention and Cultural Policy

From a policy perspective, both regional and central governments actively participate in traditional arts preservation through studio development programs, festivals, and intangible cultural heritage certification. These initiatives demonstrate the government's commitment to safeguarding traditional arts. However, many cultural practitioners perceive government approaches as overly bureaucratic and insufficiently responsive to the real needs of grassroots arts communities.

Formal preservation programs often prioritize documentation, festivals, and symbolic recognition rather than long-term regeneration, mentorship, and artist empowerment. This reinforces the importance of community-based governance, in which the local community remains the primary subject and decision-maker in managing its cultural heritage, rather than merely becoming the object of technocratic conservation policies [8].

Conclusion

The governance of traditional arts in Bali represents a complex and dynamic system that reflects not only aesthetic values but also the social, religious, and historical order of Balinese society. This study demonstrates that traditional arts governance in Bali has evolved through a long historical trajectory, beginning with royal patronage systems,

shifting toward community-based customary institutions, and currently undergoing adaptation under the pressures of tourism, market forces, and state cultural policies.

Traditional institutions such as *banjar* and *pakraman* villages continue to play a crucial role in preserving and managing traditional arts. However, they now face intense challenges, including functional changes in art from sacred to profane, transformations in the role of artists, and value fragmentation due to commodification. Traditional art, once inseparable from ritual and spirituality, now also functions as a cultural commodity within the tourism industry.

State intervention through cultural preservation programs shows positive intentions but remains highly dependent on its contextual alignment with local cultural realities and active community participation. Administrative recognition alone is insufficient to ensure sustainability. Therefore, the future of traditional Balinese art requires inclusive, participatory, and community-based governance that can balance the preservation of traditional values with necessary adaptation to contemporary socio-economic conditions. The sustainability of Balinese art ultimately depends on cultural empowerment that positions local communities as active subjects, not merely objects, of cultural preservation.

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