

The Cultural Anthropology of Resources: Indonesian Examples in the Transnational Age

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Introduction

This paper serves as an introduction to the panel, “Innovation and Manipulation of Cultural Resources in Indonesia in the Age of Globalization.” As the organizer of the panel, first of all, I think it appropriate to explain a little bit about the background of the panel.

The idea of this panel has its origin in an ongoing major anthropological research project in Japan in which I am involved. The project is called “The Distribution and Sharing of Resources in Symbolic and Ecological Systems.” We call it “The Anthropology of Resources” for short. It started from September 2002 and will continue until March 2007. Funded by a grant-in-aid from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, this is one of the biggest anthropological projects in Japan in which about fifty anthropologists and ten scholars from related disciplines, belonging to diverse academic institutions throughout Japan, are involved as core members. The project leader is Professor Motomitsu Uchibori at the ILCAA (the Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

According to the official website of the project, its purpose is explained as follows:

The project aims at developing a new integrative perspective of anthropological research through focusing upon feedback processes between formations of “symbolic resources” and of “ecological resources.” These two categories of resources jointly constitute the very basis that any human society works on. Our theoretical attempts are directed at establishing the thesis that modes of resource allocation, distribution and common sharing reveal the most fundamental mechanisms of society. This theoretical perspective enables us to analyse total current dynamic social processes at various global as well as local levels ranging from micro-scale societies to supranational regions. The validity of the theory in its turn will depend on its applicability to the problems that humankind faces in the contemporary world.



The researchers involved in this project are further grouped into eight research groups under the head research office at the ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. These groups deal with specific categories of resources: (1) Cultural Resources, (2) Distribution of Knowledge (Knowledge Resources), (3) Subsistence and Commodities (Petty Commodity Resources), (4) Money in Gift Economies (Monetary Resources), (5) Things in Nature (Natural Resources), (6) Symbolisation of Artefacts (Archaeological Resources), (7) Territorial Space (Ecological Resources), and (8) Human body (Body Resources).

These research groups work together so that we can research into various aspects of resources involving more than one group, though I am not going to explain the research activities of each group here. Of the eight research groups, I am in charge of the first research group, the Cultural Resources Group. Here culture is taken as a set of symbolic resources that can be consciously reworked and manipulated for social, economic and political purposes under certain historical conditions. From this perspective, culture should be understood as undergoing a dynamic process of shaping and reshaping in history, rather than having an unchanging essence; it is a set of resources to be produced, manipulated and contested. From this point of view, our group has examined ethnographically various topics such as colonialism, language, education, tourist development, museums, arts, and religion in various regions from Japan to Australia and from post-Soviet Siberia to Madagascar.

With this background in mind, this panel intends to examine the dynamics of the use of culture as a resource, particularly focusing on contemporary Indonesia in the “changing global context,” the theme of this symposium. By the term “changing global context,” I mean especially the transnational human flows around Indonesia which have accelerated in recent years. Therefore, we are concerned not only with cases within the Indonesian nation-state but also beyond Indonesian national boundaries. Within Indonesia, we will focus on three particular regions: Bali, Sumba and Sumatra, and beyond Indonesia, we will pay special attention to Johor and Sabah in Malaysia. In so doing, the panel aims to help shed light on the dynamics of culture as a resource in Indonesia in the age of transnationalization.

On the Concept of Cultural Resources and Cultural Capital

Before entering into the Indonesian context, however, I should say something about the concept of resources in general, and cultural resources in particular. Our fundamental



assumption is that we do not regard a resource as something that exists out there but as something that becomes a resource. This conceptualization of resources may be similar to that of the economic geographer Erich W. Zimmerman in his classic book, *World Resources and Industries*, originally published in 1930. In this, he argued that “resources become,” not that “resources are” (Zimmerman 1951:11). In this view, a resource is defined as something that can be available for a certain purpose with certain conditions. For example, some minerals such as coal and petroleum only become resources with certain technological inventions and with the emergence of industrial society. To take a more recent example, human body parts have become a medical resource with the advancement of medical technology for curing patients who previously would have been considered incurable. On the other hand, something that was once an important resource in the past may be abandoned today or in the future. For example, petroleum will be exhausted soon or later because of over-use. Some resources will be replaced by competing resources, as with the shift from coal to oil or from oil to nuclear power as sources of energy. Therefore, one can assume a sort of life cycle of resources.

Our group deals with cultural resources. We could say that all resources are in principle “cultural,” because something becomes a resource by being given some cultural value. So “natural” resources also could be “cultural,” in so far as human beings make use of the natural environment and natural materials through their cultural apparatus. Nature for human beings is nothing but “cultured nature.” This is particularly the case with ecotourism with which I have been concerned for recent years. In ecotourism, nature is ideologically constructed within the framework of contemporary environmentalism, within which affluent middle class tourists search for the meaning and value of nature. In this sense, ecotourism is clearly a socio-cultural product in which nature becomes a cultural resource which is produced and presented for a certain type of tourists (Yamashita 2005).

As Paul Dimaggio has argued, cultural resources can become cultural capital under certain conditions. According to him, *cultural capital* refers to proficiency in the consumption of (and discourse about) generally prestigious – that is, institutionally screened and validated – cultural goods, while *cultural resources* means any form of symbolic mastery that is useful in a specific relational context (Dimaggio 1991: 134). In other words, cultural capital is a developed form of cultural resource which has been granted a degree of institutionalised privilege. Pierre Bourdieu to whom we owe the term “cultural capital,” assumes that it exists in three forms:



- (1) Cultural capital embodied in *habitus* such as knowledge, taste, sensibility, skill, disposition, and so on.
- (2) Cultural capital objectified in the material forms such as arts, books, tools, crafts and so on.
- (3) Cultural capital recognized institutionally such as licenses, degrees, other qualifications and so on. (Bourdieu 1979)

Of the three forms of cultural capital, we are particularly interested in the first, i.e. how the *habitus*, daily cultural practice, becomes a cultural resource and then develops into a form of cultural capital. This is the case, for example, with an Indonesian migrant who opens an Indonesian restaurant in Tokyo to make a living. In this case the Indonesian migrants use their cultural resources which are embodied in their knowledge and skill in Indonesian food as cultural capital to make a living in the newly adopted host society.

It is also important to know that that Bourdieu sees culture in a dynamic way. According to him, “culture is not what one is but what one has, or, rather what one has become” (Bourdieu 1990: 211). On the basis of this dynamic view of culture, we have to analyze the process by which things become resources or by which we make something into a cultural resource or cultural capital.

Becoming Resources: Nation-States, Global Market, and Communities of Practice

For the analysis of this process of “becoming resources,” the fundamental question is who uses what, for what purpose, and in what kind of contexts. As Gordon Mathews notes, there are two fundamental agents that regulate cultural production today: the state and the market (Mathews 2000: 6-11). In modern nation-states, different forms of local and regional culture such as language, literature, arts, dances and religion, have become resources that are mobilized in the formation and maintenance of a national culture especially, through school education.

At the same time, with the penetration of capitalism into the remotest corners of the world, culture has also become a commodity that is bought and sold in a transnational market. Typical examples are music and food. Latin American *reggae* or Indonesian *gamelan* have



become “world music” to be sold on CD in the global market. In a big city like Jakarta, one can eat foods from all over the world: Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, American, French, Italian and other cuisines. The “cultural industry,” the term originally used by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in 1947 in a negative sense to describe mass cultural production such as film, music or television (Adorno 1990), has penetrated into almost every corner of daily life in late capitalism. What Mathews call the “cultural supermarket” now prevails in the age of the consumer society today.

Even though the nation-state and the global economic market are two fundamental agents of resource production in contemporary world, we also have to stress that culture is actually learned and lived in a rather small “life-world,” what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger call a “community of practice.” This may be a community festival or a school classroom or a workplace. People make use of cultural resources or cultural capital for as part of their strategies for their own lives. It is this community of practice in which individuals form their own cultural identities while using cultural resources and cultural capital for their own purposes.

Cultural Resources Produced in the Contexts of Tourism: A Balinese

Example

Let us take an example of the innovation and manipulation of cultural resources from the case of tourist development with which I have been concerned: namely Bali in Indonesia. Tourism in Bali goes back to the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, the German artist Walter Spies, the Mexican illustrator Miguel Covarrubias, the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, and her husband Gregory Bateson “discovered Balinese culture.” Through their “gazes” on Bali, Balinese culture was re-created for tourist audiences from outside (for a fuller discussion, see Yamashita 2003: Chapter 3).

After Indonesian independence, the first five-year development plan under the former Suharto regime began in 1969. Under this plan, tourism was seen as an important source of foreign exchange earnings for Indonesia, Bali was designated as the most important of Indonesia’s international destinations. The Balinese provincial government adopted a policy of development through tourism with a special emphasis on cultural tourism. Since then, Bali



has grown successfully as an international tourist destination to a level which the Balinese Provincial Government currently describes as follows:

Bali and tourism is inseparable, not only the Bali provincial government has a high expectation but also most of the community has a high hope on this sector. All the efforts of both community and Bali province government to build the tourism industry are the correct way as Bali has no potential on mining. The art and culture and customs plus the nature beauty of the island are valuable asset to build this sector (Balinese Provincial Government website: www.bali.go.id).

In this process of tourism development, Balinese culture has become an “asset” economically as well as politically, both for the province of Bali and the Indonesian nation-state. Local culture has become part of the tourist industry in Bali in which “touristic culture,” culture created in the context of tourism, has emerged. Dance performances, for example, have now become commercialized for touristic purposes, not only in the capital city of Denpasar but also in the rural areas such as Peliatan and Ubud. For individual Balinese, therefore, dancing may become a cultural resource by which they can make a living, while dance performances for community festivals still remain as well (Yamashita 2003: Chapter 4 and 6).

In this process of commercialization of performing arts, we can observe the standardization of dance performances because a group that presents commercial performances to tourist audiences needs an official permit (*pramana patram budaya*) to meet the national criteria for cultural performances. In allocating a permit, the dancing and performance is evaluated by a committee which consists of cultural officials from the provincial government, professors from the national art schools, and other specialists in the cultural field. The Balinese dances are then taught and reproduced at the National Dance High School (SMKI, Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia) and at the Arts University (STSI, Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia) in Denpasar rather than in the dance performances by traditional associations called *seka (sekeh)* in the villages (Yamashita 2003: 48-49). In this way, Balinese culture has become a form of cultural capital in the context of tourism between nation-states and economic markets (Picard 1995: 55).

Between the Indonesian nation-state and the global economic market, the Balinese provincial government recognizes that the tourism sector is very risky and sensitive to changes in social, economic, political and security conditions, not only at the local and national, but also at the global level:

The tourism sector experienced the most challenging event in the last two years, national economy crisis and tragedy black September 2001 in USA. Then Bali bomb blast in Kuta Bali in October 2002.



This event represented a very bad dream for tourism industry as the security and comfortable situation are an absolute necessity for economy in Bali (Balinese Provincial Government website: www.bali.go.id).

Therefore, after the disaster of September 11 and Bali bombing, the hotel occupancy rate fell drastically to under 30 percent. In 2002, 1.29 million people travelled to Bali, a decrease of 5.23 percent from the 1.36 million of the previous year. In 2003, the year in which the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic occurred in Asia, the number of visitors to Bali went down further to 993,000, though in 2004 it recovered to 1.46 million, almost the same level as in 2000. The “ups and downs” of the tourism sector in Bali remind us of the idea of the cycle of cultural resources. Under certain conditions cultural resources like natural resources may cease to be a resource. Cultural resources are made and remade, and abandoned in the dynamic processes of history.

On the Panel

There are eight presenters in this panel. Five are from Japan, and three are from Indonesia. The panel consists of three sessions. Unfortunately, Professor Makoto Inoue from the University of Tokyo who originally planned to present his paper on the forests in East Kalimantan as a cultural resource was not able to come because of his wife’s sickness.

Following my introduction, in Session One, chaired by Koji Miyazaki (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), Haruya Kagami (Kanazawa University) will present his paper on regional autonomy (*otonomi daerah*) and cultural resources in the political context of post-Suharto Indonesia, by taking the example of Bali. Then, Indah Setyawati (Asian Development Bank), Stepanus Makambombu (GTZ), and David A.N. Fina (GMIT), will give a joint-paper on the “emerging lords” in East Sumba in which non-Sumbanese merchants developed social networks with the *maramba* (lords) in the rural areas: they made use of cultural resources to gain socio-economic power.

In Session Two, chaired by Motomitsu Uchibori (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), Nursyirwan Effendi (University of Andalas) will present a paper on contested cultural identity among urban migrant entrepreneurs, taking as examples three Sumatran cities. Next, Koji Miyazaki will talk about the overseas Javanese in Johor, Malaysia, who use cultural resources (magic) as sorcerers and healers in the niche between the Javanese and Malay boundaries.



Third, Makoto Itoh (Tokyo Metropolitan University) will examine the case of Bugis migrants, and discuss social networks as a social resource in relation to of Bugis migrants in Sumatra, Indonesia, and Sabah, Malaysia.

In Session Three, chaired by Shinji Yamashita, Riwanto Tirtosudarmo from LIPI will discuss the issue of “beyond state control,” examining Flores migrants in the Nunukan-Tawao borderland between Indonesia and Malaysia. As discussant of this panel we have Motomitsu Uchibori, the leader of the Anthropology of Resources project in Japan, who will give his comments on the papers presented in. After his comments, we will have a thirty-minute general discussion including participants and questions and comments from the floor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that the focus on cultural resources opens up a new integrated field in the study of culture that connects potentiality with reality, the material with the non-material, and culture with economics and politics in the age of globalization. What is crucial in this project is the analysis of the process by which culture becomes a resource that can be given further meaning through innovation and manipulation. What we are now presenting in this panel is the Indonesian version of this process.

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