Editor's Note: A syllabus for the course described in this article is also available in the online supplements for this issue.

Beyond Cultural Tourism: Experiencing the Arts in Bali

By Jui-Ching Wang

Music, dance, theater, and arts and crafts are important parts of Balinese culture. Their ceremonial nature reflects the multiple layers of Balinese Hindu religious practices and philosophies within the complex social-cultural structure of Balinese society. The inseparable relationships among these arts provide a vivid soundscape and landscape for students to experience the functions of arts in a living environment. Since the early twentieth century, Bali has been staged for the consumption of cultural tourists wishing to increase their knowledge by exploring the exotic traditions of the tropical island. Gradually, the Balinese have commercialized their performing arts and shifted their social religious functions to secular economic ones.

Believing that tourism helps support the traditional arts, social and cultural anthropologist Philip F. McKean suggests that such a shift "has reinforced a sense of *boundary maintenance* among the Balinese between what they do for themselves and what they do for their visitors."[1] How to guard this boundary to maintain the essential values of Balinese traditions and keep alive the island's renowned status as a living museum remains a dilemma among governmental agencies, religious leaders, artists, and merchants, but many believe that it can be solved by attracting tourists and using the income to foster Balinese culture. As a result of the impact of cultural tourism, the establishment of the *sanggar* (a private home studio) and its accessibility to tourists have replaced the *banjar*'s (village) traditional role as the cultural center to provide art activities for education and entertainment. Although criticized as an individualistic deviation from the traditional communal lifestyle, some Balinese sanggar have become effective cultural agencies that help tourists roam between boundaries to acquire knowledge and create a win-win situation for both parties.

My collaboration with Sanggar Manik Galih in a three-week study abroad course in 2014, sponsored by Northern Illinois University, created an opportunity for our students to have a more in-depth study than simply observing cultural practices. Through a contextualized learning experience in which performing arts were an essential part, we were allowed to go further, either as passively witnessing observers or as actively practicing participants, into the many cultural layers strictly defined by their animistic religious purposes. Unique to Balinese Hinduism, these purposes are daily demonstrated not only by offerings and prayers, but also by *gamelan* music and dance drama, all of which we observed and eventually practiced.

We began this learning as tourists and outsiders, but gradually developed into participants, further inside traditional Balinese culture than we had originally been. Immersing ourselves in the community and intimately interacting with local people allowed us to roam between what ethnomusicologist Peter Dunbar-Hall defines as "boundaries," sites where tourists are restricted, and "frontiers," sites where they are allowed "entry to levels of insider experience and potential knowledge."[2] With the help of culture bearers to explain the context and significance of ceremonial events, tourists may penetrate multiple frontiers where music, dance, and theater are always inseparable from religious meanings. Using Dunbar-Hall's definitions, in what follows, I highlight selected activities to explain how our roles shifted from tourists to participants and how such a transformation deepened our knowledge about this living culture.

Understanding this transformation requires knowledge of the structure of the traditional *pura* (Balinese temple), *jeroan* (innermost courtyard), *jaba tengah* (middle courtyard), and *jaba* (outer courtyard) (see Figure 1). Classified by their unique religious functions, these divisions are associated with various types of entertainment according to their degree of sacredness: *wali*, *bebali*, and *balih-balihan*. Wali, "the offering or ritual ceremony," is the sacred entertainment for the gods in the innermost courtyard. Bebali, the accompaniment to ritual or ceremony but not the ritual itself, is the entertainment for the participants in the middle courtyard; and balih-balihan, "that which is watched," is the entertainment for the public, vendors, and tourists in the outer courtyard.[3] I use this classification metaphorically to explain how the immersive curriculum allowed us to literally move from the outer courtyard to the middle courtyard and temporarily to the innermost courtyard. This transformation from observers to participants in ritual ceremonies and performance enabled us first to "watch" as tourists and later to "be watched" as part of the village. Our transformation also allowed us to penetrate more deeply into Balinese culture firmly defined by their religious and social functions. A journey of roaming in between these boundaries and frontiers of the secular and sacred had thus begun!

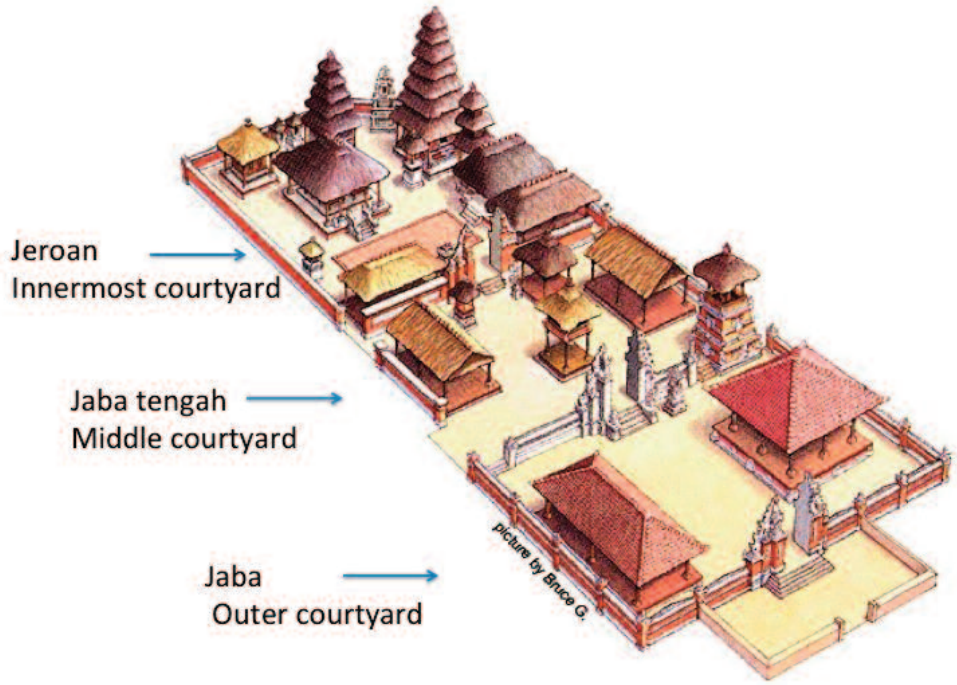

Figure 1: The structure of a Balinese temple. Source: *Nuravata Interior* at http://tinyurl.com/gsrawgc.

Balih-Balihan

We attended a *kecak*, the mistakenly called "monkey chant" trance dance that no tourists would miss. The "Kecak Fire and Trance Dance" brochure promised an authentic experience, an exotic extravaganza of singing, dancing, acting, and fighting embedded in a dreamlike animistic atmosphere, concluded by a *tari jarang sanhyang* (horse trance dance) in which a "horse" dancer repeatedly ran through flames until he collapsed. When he recovered, the horrified and sympathetic tourists, convinced of their "authentic experience," patted and tipped him.

But was it really an "authentic experience" or merely a packaged tourist program? Created for Westerners in the 1930s by German artist Walter Spies and his Balinese friends who had practiced the centuries-old sanghayng exorcism rituals,[4] this show, as anthropologist James Clifford recognizes, is an illustration of how folklore, once an integral part of a culture, becomes an exotic tourist novelty.[5] In a lecture at the sanggar, we learned that kecak was a form of "gamelan suara" in which the chorus vocally imitates traditional gamelan elements to create repetitive interlocking phrases. We also learned the epic *Ramayana* stories in which kecak is embedded, including its animistic ritual significance, many variations, and its historical development as a performance genre. Going beyond what we were presented as tourists, we understood more in this contextualized learning.

Sabungan

Gradually going futher, we entered a deeper level of balih-balihan at a village cockfight. In contrast to kecak, *sabungan* is not for tourists but only for the villagers. Originally part of a religious ritual, cockfights are now banned by the Indonesian government, because, as cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains, they are associated with gambling and seem "primitive, backward, and unprogressive," a huge embarrassment to a modern country's image.[6] Geertz studied the cultural significance of this all-male event, analyzed the cock's symbolic male power, the fight, and the complex mechanism of the historical and cultural contexts of the gambling rules. Several decades later, as we stepped into the outer courtyard of a village temple to watch a cockfight, I felt the images in Geertz's writings had come alive. This experience, another level of bali-balihan, allowed us to understand what the official Balinese tourist agency would not want the tourists to see.

From Balih-Balihan to Bebali

Progressing to the next level of exploration, we joined the villagers to observe an important ritual, *Ngaben*, a cremation ceremony involving the collective resources of many families. "The most expensive ritual to enact in Balinese society," this ceremony is rarely changed because of the Balinese desire "to correctly perform the ritual according to tradition and re-

ligious teachings . . . to honor and aid the dead."[7] It is neither entertainment nor "a staged" performing art like kecak. But the extravagant procedure that involves countless individuals making offerings, playing music, and carrying fancy high towers in a long procession has attracted many tourists. Our participation in the ceremony can be described metaphorically as bebali because we watched the spectacle that the village organized to mark the end of the deceased's physical life properly. Invited by our family friends, we witnessed the funeral of a local priest who had to be cremated within seven days of his death. Informed that this was a formal ritual, we had to put on our traditional outfits, *pakaian adat* (temple clothes). We joined the procession accompanied by gamelan *angklung*, typical funeral music, and followed the tower, a temporary housing of the body and the soul, in the procession. We walked with the villagers to the cremation ground where we witnessed the ceremony.

The puzzling religious symbolism was explained by a village elder, the head of the sanggar. The cremation of the body, consisting of the same five elements as the universe—earth, fire, water, air, and ether—releases the soul; the scattering of the ashes in water completes this release and purification by returning the five elements to the universe. To outsiders, this last step seems to have completed the funeral process, but we were told that the soul still had to return to the family temple to join the ancestors. So we acquired essential knowledge with the help of the culture bearers in the village, not only about this ceremony itself but also about its cosmological principles to which the Balinese strictly adhere to maintain a well-balanced harmony between the visible and the invisible.

With many such invitations from our Balinese family and the village, we continued to push the cultural boundaries to other levels, where we shared many more of their experiences and knowledge at weddings and temple festivals. These experiences collectively helped us understand the role of the individual in the highly collaborative structure of Balinese society. A communal lifestyle that values the group above the individual and is still practiced by contemporary Balinese society was demonstrated to us especially on ceremonial occasions that require the intensive work of the community.[8] By observing all these activities and sometimes even participating in a few of them, we were accepted as part of the family and the community, and were proud of being allowed to do *gotong royong* (communal work) with them. Such acceptance psychologically enabled us to go to an even further level of "bebali," one that transformed us from observers into participants. Instead of observing the entertainment, we became the entertainers.

Beyond Bebali?

By practicing for an average of six hours daily for fifteen days for our gamelan and dance performance at a temple festival, we learned the intimate connection between these arts and the spiritual realm. Using the traditional oral approach, we learned to play the gamelan angklung, the *slendro*-derived (four-tone musical pentatonic scale) gamelan that accompanies temple festivals and processions. One phrase after another, mistake after mistake, we repeated the melodies until we had memorized everything. This oral tradition, how Balinese typically learn music, not only sharpened our aural skills but also helped us understand the intimate relationship between music and the other performing arts, dance, and drama. To the Balinese, music is alive only when it is connected with the human soul and spirits; this is the first lesson we learned, the most elementary level of performance in Balinese tradition. By practicing tirelessly to master the music and the dance, we improved our skills. By comprehending the cultural significance of the music through which we enriched the drama of the dance, we learned their religious purposes and social functions, and all the expected etiquette. Disciplined and concentrating, we mastered the program for the performance and looked forward to an exciting spiritual experience of aesthetic enjoyment. On the day of our performance, along with other musicians, dancers, and the village crew, we dressed in our pakaian adat and in the inner courtyard knowledgeably participated in a prayer ceremony asking for purification, blessing, and enlightenment. This experience, observed by many tourists from outside the temple, made me realize that we had just become "that which is watched," pushing our tourists' boundaries further toward the frontier. An example to illustrate the difference between tourists and ourselves occurred when during the preconcert rehearsal, an American identifying himself as a musician jumped up on the stage and invited himself to play. But I told him it was impossible: he had not studied everything that we had for two weeks to prepare for this performance.

Reflection

The goal of our program was to help students understand the unique Balinese arts, their social functions, and the intricate balance between Balinese traditions and the encroachment of the modern world. With the villagers, we lived in the banjar, a perfect setting to study Balinese music, dance, and crafts. With the help of the sanggar, we actively

The students of the NIU Study Abroad-Experiencing the Arts in Bali program (July 2014) and the villagers of Bangah praying in the Ulum Danu Temple in Bratan watched by tourists encircled in red. Photo courtesy of the author.

participated in several ritual ceremonies and daily offerings, and performed at a temple festival, the cultural experiences inseparable from music making in Bali. Thus, we studied music as culture.

Although culture as a complex whole cannot be easily acquired and quickly internalized by outsiders, an intensive learning experience to study music, dance, and art in an open lab like Bali proved to be effective in helping us fulfill this goal. We soaked up the intrinsic values and institutions of the culture, and by gradually shifting our roles from observers to participants and changing from tourists (those who watch) into entertainers (those who are watched), we were able to share with the local Balinese the important values of their beliefs and customs through *our* behaviors. By displaying our respect for these values, we earned their trust. And the stronger our mutual trust became, the more we were encouraged to continually push their boundaries and penetrate further frontiers. I know that our changes did not turn us into Balinese; but if asked "how far did we go?" on this trip, I would be very proud to answer, "Far beyond tourism."

NOTES

1. Philip F. McKean, "Cultural Involution: Tourists, Balinese, and the Process of Modernization in an Anthropological Perspective" (PhD dissertation, Brown University, 1973), 1, quoted in Michel Picard, "Cultural Tourism in Bali: Cultural Performances as Tourist Attraction," *Indonesia* 49, 38.
2. Peter Dunbar-Hall, "Culture, Tourism and Cultural Tourism: Boundaries and Frontiers in Performances of Balinese Music and Dance, " in *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Jennifer Post (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 56.
3. I. Wayan Dibia, *Taksu: In and Beyond Arts* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Kanisius Printing, 2012), 10–11.
4. I. Wayan Dibia and Rucina Ballinger, *A Guide to the Performing Arts of Bali: Balinese Dance, Drama, and Music* (Hong Kong: Tuttle Publishing, 2004).
5. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 222, 223.
6. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 414.
7. Frank R. Chappell, *Selling of Your Relatives. The Impact of Cultural Tourism on Balinese Ritual Life*, 63, accessed May 10, 2016, http://tinyurl.com/jgz7fvp.
8. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 167–234.

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