

# Reconstruction and Transformation of Regional Culture Through Tourism: The case of Bangka Belitung Province

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**Abstract**— My most recent research has focused on the province of Bangka Belitung, Indonesia. This province has been an important global tin mining center since the 18th century, but tin has been depleted in recent years and there is a big demand for new industries to replace tin mining. In recent years, the province has begun to focus on tourism development to replace tin mining, and tourism in the province, especially in Belitung Island, is attracting attention in Indonesia. Although ethnically, the Melayu people are in the majority, other ethnic groups such as Chinese have flowed into the region as tin miners since the Dutch colonial era, which is why this province is a multi-ethnic/multi-cultural area. Using Informal interviews and collecting data in Bangka-Belitung islands and Jakarta, I found that the role of central/local government and locals in tourism there. We can see how local government try to make the region more attractive by seeing some movements such as holding cultural event and supporting local residents with commodities, and so forth. Interestingly there are some differences between Bangka and Belitung regarding to the conditions of tourism development. However, both islands are now trying to use multi-cultural characteristic, like Melayu culture and Chinese Indonesian culture, in each touristic event or spot to show how their province is "unique" and attractive. Also, the mine site itself has the potential to be a regional cultural resource. Recently there are some local residents who struggle to construct a new leisure spot near the tin mine.

**Keywords**—Indonesia, Tourism, Tin mining, Culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

### I-a. Overview of Bangka Belitung

This study focuses on the province of Bangka Belitung which locates near the southern coast of Sumatra island, Indonesia [fig.1]. This province contains several small islands, Bangka Island, and Belitung Island. Also, the population of this province is consisted of 71% Melayu, 11% Chinese, 5% Javanese and 2% Buginese among more than 1,372,000 people [1]. As described later, this province was independent of the Province of South Sumatra in 2000 and is relatively new province. This province flourishes with fishery, cultivating white pepper, and tin mining. Especially Tin mining, which was developed into a major industry during the colonial era of the 18th century and has greatly supported the economy of the province, is the most important industry in this region. Bangka Belitung has various ethnic groups, especially overseas Chinese who were inflowed as tin miners since 18th century, and many of them are still settled.

The culture of Bangka Belitung is heavily influenced by the Melayu culture for its locational reasons[2]. So far, the state's history, especially the written history, relies heavily on

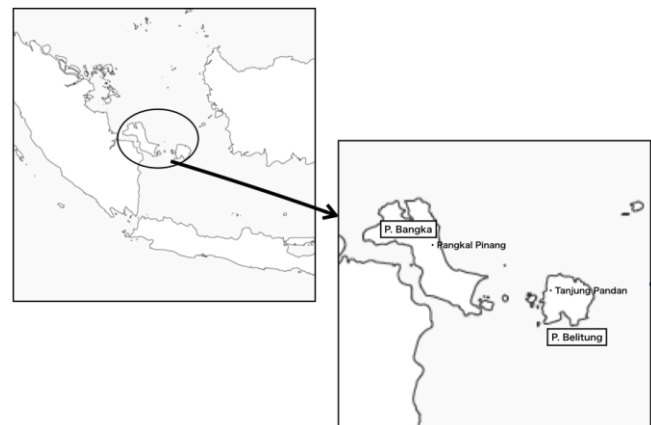


Fig. 1 Localisation areas of this study.

Dutch literature. According to the Indonesian historical literature, Bangka Belitung was ruled by the Srivijaya dynasty and the Majapahit dynasty, but the history before the 1590s, when the Javanese first visited the region, is still unclear. Actually there are not any written historical literature in Indonesian or local languages on the history of this region especially before 1590s [3], thus circumstanced, local people had no choice but to rely on oral history.

Before independent of the Province of South Sumatra, the culture of Bangka Belitung was grouped with South Sumatra's one [1], and because there are not enough historical literatures, it wasn't easy for people in Bangka Belitung to reconsider their own culture. Also, since they have long been involved in tin mine development, there had been little opportunity to reconsider their own culture. However, in recent years, there has been opportunities for them to be aware of their own culture. Those are, firstly, the independence of the province, and secondly, the emergence of tourism development.

### I-b. Province independence

The province of Bangka Belitung became independent of the province of South Sumatra in 2000, following the collapse of the Suharto authoritarian regime and the trend of decentralization. After democratization and decentralization, the local culture, which had previously been state-proved by the Suharto regime, has become proved by the local governments [4]. The book "Presidium Pembentukan Propinsi Bangka Belitung", was published to highlight the need to establish the province, describes the society, economy, security, culture of Bangka Belitung [1]. In such

way, in order to become independent as a province, people in the region needed to show what their customs / culture is. However, as mentioned above, there are little historical documents before the Dutch colonial era, and there was no Indonesian document that could be used as a reference for reconsidering something, for example, customs or cultures [3]. Thus they used the literatures which were written in Dutch at that time [1].

The customs and local culture of the province are described in the books and the official website of the province. For example, the official website of the province of Bangka Belitung describes the profile of the region. The social culture is described as follows.

*Penduduk Pulau Bangka dan Pulau Belitung yang semula dihuni orang-orang suku laut, dalam perjalanan sejarah yang panjang membentuk proses kulturisasi dan akulturasi. [...] Sedangkan mereka yang tinggal di Riau Kepulauan berlayar ke Bangka. Datang juga kelompok-kelompok Orang Laut dari Pulau Sulawesi dan Kalimantan. Pada gelombang berikutnya, ketika mulai dikenal adanya Suku Bugis, mereka datang dan menetap di Bangka, Belitung dan Riau. Lalu datang pula orang dari Johor, Siantan yang Melayu, campuran Melayu-Cina, dan juga asli Cina, berbaur dalam proses akulturasi dan kulturisasi. Kemudian datang pula orang-orang Minangkabau, Jawa, Banjar, Kepulauan Bawean, Aceh dan beberapa suku lain yang sudah lebih dulu melebur. Lalu jadilah suatu generasi baru: Orang Melayu Bangka Belitung [5].*

These above sentences says that a new generation, "orang melayu Bangka Belitung", has been created in the province by the various ethnic groups such as orang laut that are said to be indigenous ethnic groups, and Bugisians, Melayu, Chinese and Javanese, and so forth. However, the definition of "orang melayu Bangka Belitung" is still vague and does not specifically mention what is the unique customs and cultures of the province are like.

#### *I-c. Tourism Industry*

Indonesia is one of the most famous tourism nation which has various attractive tourist destinations such as Bali, Yogyakarta and Tana Toraja and so forth. Under the president Joko Widodo regime, the government regards a tourism industry as important sector, because tourism is the key for Indonesia's economy in recent years, and they set a new policy which is named "10 Bali baru" (10 new Bali). So far, Bali is the most popular tourist destination in Indonesia, and now the government aims to develop tourism in Indonesia as a whole by promoting tourism in other areas, and Tanjung Kelayang, Belitung, was selected as one of ten areas for this policy in 2016 [6].

Tourism industry in Bangka Belitung has been growing rapidly since after one of the most famous film in Indonesia "Laskar Pelangi" (Rainbow Troops) was broadcasted in 2008. This film is based on a novel originally written by Andrea Hirata, which is the most popular novel in Indonesia. Belitung, the stage of this award-winning film, has quickly became a popular tourist destination. In addition, As mentioned above, after being selected as 10 new Bali, tourism promotion to domestic and foreign countries were also started. Now, thanks to efforts of the Ministry of

Tourism, there are direct flights from Singapore and Malaysia to Belitung.

As described above, the province has various ethnic groups from outside the islands to develop tin mine industry. In this research, I would like to argue how this multi-ethnic/cultural characteristic is represented in the tourism field by observing the tourism industry in this province from the perspectives of local residents or bottom-up side.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

### *II-a. Literature Review*

So far, tourism has been considered in many kinds of disciplines. For example, in anthropology, tourism has defined as the act of buying and selling what is well-known in foreign or unfamiliar places as temporary entertainment [7]. These definitions are based on the sociological study of tourism using the Foucault's "the gaze" concept [8]. Based on these definition, Ota [9] has argued in Japanese anthropology that the culture, as a tourism resources, is being selected for tourism. Specifically, he introduced the idea of "objectification of culture" to explain how cultures are selected by mutual negotiation based on the unbalanced power relationship between hosts and guests. Tourism studies in Indonesia and Southeast Asia have also discussed on the relationships between tourism and acculturation based on such arguments [10]. Tourism studies in multi-ethnic areas, for example Singapore, have criticized that each cultures, like Chinese and Indian cultures, are dividedly used like vegetables in salad bowls as tourism resources, and therefore, culture which is peculiar to the area has not been created [11]. Following these previous researches, I'd like to point out 2 criticize points as below.

A. The process or phase of the regional culture development through tourism is not clear.

In multi-ethnic areas, the aspect of social structure, in which each ethnic group is divided, have been reflected in the cultural resources in tourism and tourism itself. In previous researches, there are little argument which focuses on the developmental process of the distinctive culture to each region. Therefore, I believe that, by examining the state of Bangka Belitung in this research, we will be able to see the aspect of forming a distinctive culture, in the process of mixing culture from various ethnicity and being made into tourist resources.

B. There is not enough discussion about "objectification of culture" in regions where tourism is still immature.

Previous researches have targeted areas that are relatively mature as touristic destinations. I expect that by conducting contemporary research in the province of Bangka Belitung, in which tourism is now in the process of development, the phase of "objectification of culture" among hosts or local residents will be seen more clearly. Also, I expect that we will be able to see the process how a mixed multi-ethnic culture is recognized as a regional distinctive culture through objectification.

### *II-b. Objectives and Methods*

The purpose of this study is to clarify what kind of regional culture has been mobilized and used by various actors such as central and local governments, local NGOs and local residents in tourism in Bangka Belitung, and in the process, how the regional culture has been transformed and reconstructed, and what kind of regional culture images have been created as a result. I expect that, by examining above, it will become clear that cultural images are not pressed from outside the region, but is brought out among the local residents and such cultures would be more diverse than before the development of tin mines started.

This paper focuses on movement of local residents. By considering the results from fieldwork, I'd like to reveal how they are going to promote tourism development in the province, and how the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourist Bureau will support them and promote tourism in this province.

I conducted fieldwork in Bangka Belitung in August-September 2018, January-March 2019. Informal interviews were conducted to the provincial and prefectural tourist bureau and local residents. In Jakarta, in addition to conducting interviews at the Ministry of Tourism, I also collected documents at the National Library.

### III. THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND THE TOURISM BUREAU

Before considering what kind of cultures are sold or represented by local residents in the tourism, this chapter try to summarize how the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Bureau in Bangka Belitung attempt to promote tourism in this region. Basically, both the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Bureau have a stance of "being supporter", and tourism development in this province heavily relies on the local residents. It can be said that, in Phuket which had tin mines and is known as a world-class tourist destination, tourism development was led by the central government [12], and in this sense, tourism development in Bangka Belitung is different from the case of Phuket. Then, how does the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Bureau support the local residents of the province?

#### *III-a. Ministry of Tourism*

President Joko Widodo established new policy "*10 Bali Baru*", and Tanjung Kelayang, Belitung was selected as one of ten regions. Under this policy, the Ministry of Tourism said that they invested 290 trillion rupiah for tourism development in 2018 [6]. According to the local media, this funds are mainly used for infrastructure development and regional development. In addition to these, the Ministry of Tourism also carries out tourism promotion and attracting direct flights from abroad for tourism development in Belitung. In an interview conducted at the Ministry of Tourism in January 2019, I was able to listen to one of the staffs there. According to the interview results, the Ministry of Tourism carries out the tourism promotions for Belitung and that is mainly conducted by the marketing department. She said that staffs in the marketing department often travel back and forth between Jakarta and Belitung more than every two weeks, and visit the local Tourist Bureau. The promotions currently being conducted by the marketing

department are mainly focused on SNS and advertising in the planes, and the main target is domestic travelers. They target on domestic tourists first, and then will plan to shift the target to foreign tourists after the number of domestic tourists increased enough.

If you look at the website "Indonesia Tourism - wonderful Indonesia" on the Indonesian tourism created by the Ministry of Tourism, you can browse the pages of tourist destinations in each regions [12]. Looking for articles on Bangka Belitung on the website, beaches and other nature tourist destinations are listed there, and there are little articles deal with the regional culture.

#### *III-b. Tourism Bureau*

The province of Bangka Belitung has both provincial and prefectural Tourism Bureaus. The provincial Tourism Bureau is more focused on tourism promotion than the prefectural Tourism Bureaus, and actively participates in tourism exhibitions in Indonesia and overseas such as Singapore and Malaysia. On the other hands, prefectural Tourism Bureaus are more community-based. The prefectural Tourism Bureaus support tourism development through the support of supplies as needed by the local residents. According to the staff of the Tourism Bureau in east Belitung, such supports are not provided with cash directly. For example, they provide the local residents who do homestay at their house with materials such as beds and air conditioners that need as accommodation. A home stay in Manggar, East Belitung prefecture, where I was staying during my fieldwork, was just getting a new beds and air conditioners from the local Tourism Bureau. There are not so many hotels in Manggar and guests need to look for hotels or home stays from among few options. The prefectural Tourism Bureaus also collect informations on home stays and hotels, and publish it in a public relations magazines which issued by the Tourism Bureau.

Public relations activities of both provincial and prefectural Tourism Bureau use SNS, especially Instagram and Facebook. The Ministry of Tourism also conducts public relations using SNS, but they hires influencers to introduce attractive tourist destinations. On the other hand, in the Tourism Bureaus, SNS has been updated by the Tourism Bureau staffs. Particularly, the prefectural Tourism Bureau have issued pamphlets and public relations magazines in addition to those activities on SNS. We can get informations on the tourist events, ritual events, and tourist destinations that are conducted in each area through SNS and public relations magazines of the provincial and prefectural Tourism Bureaus. The cultures unique to this province which can be seen in such public relations activities are basically Melayu culture, and the traditional ritual of the *orang laut* that are said to be an indigenous people, especially like *suku sawang*. Also, they have introduced about Chinese Buddhist temples and *Cap Go Meh* festival which celebrates Chinese New Year in their public relations activities.

When I visited the Tourist Bureau in Belitung in January 2019, they were planning to make the 2019 tourist event calendar. The provincial Tourist Bureaus collect informations on touristic events at least a year before and collect them into the calendar. In addition to the traditional events as mentioned above, the events which are hosted by



the local residents also included in the calendar. Therefore, local residents who want to host events need to go to the Tourism Bureau in advance and to discuss the time and place of the events. After the Tourism Bureau received a request for holding the events, they hold the meeting and decide on implementation of the events officially. These community-led events are being actively organized. Then, the next chapter will summarize how bottom-up tourism development is implemented in this province and what kind of cultures are being pushed out in the tourism.

#### IV. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BY LOCAL RESIDENTS

"We will continue to make efforts to develop tourism in Bangka Belitung!"

It was at the event celebrating the Chinese New Year in Belitung, that the Governor of prefecture Belitung declared loudly. The event was also led by a Chinese-Indonesian community, and the Tourism Bureau also supported them by advertising the event and lending necessary equipment. In this way, the provincial / prefectural tourism bureau are supporting local residents and trying to promote tourism in this province. This chapter focus on how the local residents are developing tourism and what kind of cultures they are trying to offer.

##### *IV-a. Tourism in Belitung*

Andrea Hirata, the author of novel "*Laskar pelangi*", founded "*Museum Kata Andrea Hirata*" in 2010 in Gantung, East Belitung, where was the stage of the novel. Interestingly, local residents from the neighbor are also involved in the construction and operation of the museum.

"At first the local government didn't do anything, so we struggled very hard. At that time, Belitung did not conscious of tourism yet.", said a nephew of Andrea Hirata, one of who worked at the establishment of the museum. Although the museum has a literary theme, some of the exhibits introduce the regional culture and history. The culture mainly took up here is Melayu culture. To be precise, many Chinese-Indonesian also live in Gantung, and in the novel of Andrea Hirata, there is also a story that a Melayu boy living in this town falls in love with a Chinese-Indonesian girl [13]. However, Chinese culture has not been taken up in the museum. "The culture of Belitung is based on the culture of Melayu just as we speak Malay, so the museum also introduces the Melayu culture.", said one of the staff in museum. There is also a café inside the museum where you can enjoy "*ngopi*", a Belitung tradition. This museum is a place where you can learn about the regional cultures of the province, and many movie fans and tourists come from around the world.

*Museum Kata* is located in eastern Belitung, but the tourist destinations are concentrated in western Belitung. The airport and harbor are located around western Belitung. Also, there are more beautiful beaches in western Belitung than in eastern Belitung. For these reasons, many tourists concentrate in western Belitung and stay there. Therefore, events held by local residents, tourism agencies and souvenir shops are also concentrated in western Belitung as well. Melayu culture has been exhibited at the *Museum*

*Kata*, but in western Belitung, there are different movements.

In western Belitung, there is a tourist destination called "*rumah adat*", where you can learn the old life of Belitung. In side the *rumah adat* are decorated with interior that imitate traditional houses and there are also photographs of Dutch colonial times on the wall. At first glance, *rumah adat* also seemed to introduce only Melayu culture. However, the staff explained that the colors used for the traditional decorations and traditional costumes that are exhibited there are influenced by the Chinese culture. "As a worker of tin mining, Chinese people have been living here for long period. Our culture has also been influenced by the Chinese culture, as can be seen from these costumes and decorations."

The event to celebrate the Chinese New Year in 2019, which was held in western Belitung was said to be the first time to be implemented on a large scale supported by the Tourism Bureau in Belitung. This event, *Cap Go Meh*, was held at a venue along the beach in western Belitung and was organized by a middle-aged Chinese-Indonesian man. However, Melayu and other people were also actively involved in managing this event. For example, when Chinese dance was performed in the event, it was not the Chinese who danced as their dancers, but the Melayu boys. And it was not Chinese-Indonesian but Melayu people who cut and divided Chinese traditional sweets, which is always used to celebrate the Chinese New Year, at the event [fig.2]. Thus, it has become clear that not only Melayu culture but also Chinese culture are represented at tourists event by the local residents. Interestingly, Melayu culture or Chinese culture were not represented separately like vegetables in salad bowls, but both culture were mixed and represented as a culture of Belitung.

##### *IV-b. Tourism in Bangka*

Bangka seems to be lagging behind tourism development compared to Belitung. However, there is a high school specializing in tourism, and it is said that actually tourism development in Bangka started faster than Belitung. Same as in Belitung, basically beautiful beaches and Melayu culture are spotlighted in tourism in Bangka.

In addition to tourists, there are many people visiting the capital city of Bangka island, Pangkal Pinang for business purposes. Bangka also have the Tin Museum about 20 minutes drive from the airport. There are exhibits which you can learn about the history of tin mines and the process of tin production in the museum. However, tin mining is currently shrinking, and many local residents have been forced to change their jobs from tin mining related jobs. As a new business, many people are paying attention on the tourism industry. Actually, there are many people who originally engaged in tin mining, and shifted to the tourism industry. Some of them who now own the Bangka Botanical Garden, and some operate a tourist entertainment spot at Sungai Liat, which is far from the state capital. Some Chinese-Indonesian people have been asked by the provincial Tourism Bureau to set up a Chinese-style Buddhist temple, and others have also hosted Chinese New Year events sponsored by the Tourism Bureau in Bangka.

There are many Chinese-Indonesian people like them in Bangka, and solidarity of them are strong. There are also many people who is of mixed blood with Chinese-Indonesian and Melayu, and culturally they accept both Melayu culture and Chinese culture.

A 20-minute drive south of Pangkal pinang, there is a new tourist facility and was still being constructed when I visited Bangka on January 2019. It is said that this place was originally a mine site. In the plan, this sightseeing and entertaining facility attracts many tourists by setting up booth where we can enjoy both beach and the culture of Bangka. According to pamphlet of the facility, the culture which is represented here is mainly Melayu culture, but the person who involves in the establishment expects that the tin mine itself to be experienced by tourists as the culture of Bangka. "Tin mining is destroying the environment. That might be right. But what would have happened to this island without tin? This island has become rich because of tin mine. Tin made our history and culture. ", said one of the founder.

#### *IV-c. Looking for regional culture*

Both Bangka and Belitung are now trying to reconstruct or transform regional-specific culture through tourism. In tourism of this province, instead of representing Melayu culture, Chinese culture, or indigenous traditional rituals dividedly, they are trying to represent mixed culture of all of them which have constructed through the history of tin mining. In short, in the tourism scene, rather than just introducing each culture dividedly, representing them in mixed or related manner. Such attitude is apparent from, for example, the Chinese cultural festivals in this region as described above, and the development of tourist entertainment facilities which regards the tin mine itself as a culture.

Recently, as tourism has developed, many people who went out side the province are coming back. Such young people are also exploring regional-specific culture. For example, a food that is considered "nostalgic" to the people of the region has been used as a restaurant menu, and a Bangka-Belitung-style batik has been devised. These people are not necessarily thinking purely about their own culture, but they inevitably face with such cultural exploration as they consider the attractions in tourism.

#### V. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of tourism development in the province of Bangka Belitung, nature, such as beaches, were exclusively spotlighted. However, as tourism development progressed, traditional rituals and Melayu culture have been regarded as tourism resources, and it has been recognized by local people that "the mixture of customary culture and Melayu culture" is the culture of the province. In addition, my recent research also revealed that the Chinese culture has been actively mobilized in tourism and mixed culture is recognized as regional-specific culture. And it could be inferred that the regional culture of this province, which had been a tribute to Melayu / custom culture, is gradually

becoming more diverse and mixed. Also, local residents are now reconsidering both negative and positive view of tin mines and they regards tin mine itself as a regional culture as well.

Tourism is considered in various disciplines such as anthropology and sociology and so forth. Since Indonesia is a country where tourism is thriving, researches on tourism also have been conducted in many areas. My recent research focuses on tourism in the province of Bangka Belitung, where tourism development began after decentralization. Decentralization is considered to be a very important incident not only because it brought about the independence of the provinces in various places, but also because it became possible to freely express its own culture in each region. Particularly, Bangka Belitung had little opportunity to reconsider their own culture until independent as the province. Movements of cultural transformation and reconstruction that were not possible under the Suharto regime are now happened in this province. It is very interesting that what kind of culture will be represented as their unique culture in the multi-ethnic region after decentralization. Further research on the transformation and reconstruction of the regional culture in the province of Bangka Belitung will be continued.

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