

Fostering Cultural Exchange Through Performing Arts To Improve Communication Between Different Ethnic And Religion In Indonesia

Meyda Bestari

Graduate Student of International Relations Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

Email: meyda.bestari@gmail.com

Abstract

Indonesia is known with its diversity. There are many local dialects, local culture, and different religions live and grow in this country. In the recent years, there are many problems regarding to Indonesia's diversity. One of them is action done by pressure group towards what they claimed as misguided beliefs through violence. It causes by miscommunication between actors of the communication. Visual and theatrical performances have been practiced in Indonesia since Wali era or even before it. It is one of the tools of communication that effective enough to spread cultural and religious values in society. It creates understanding between society without using violence and pressure.

This paper will use communication and soft power concept to answer question How to improve communication between different ethnics and religions in Indonesia? Methods use in this paper will be qualitative methods with library research. Data will be collected from book, journal, article, and information from internet that relevant with the topic. This paper believes that to improve social communication between different ethnic and religion in Indonesia, one of them is by fostering the cultural exchange between each ethnic and religion in the form of visual and theatrical performances. This method is not only could cope with friction among ethnics and religions, but also it gives positive alternative for young artists to channel their talent.

Keywords: *Cultural exchange, diversity, performances, social communication,*

Introduction

Indonesia is a country with high diversity. There are many forms of culture, local languages, natural diversity, ethnics, and religion. Indonesia is a country that legitimized six religions; they are Islam, Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Confucian. All of these religions are stated in its newest law, which is Presidential Decree No.6/2000 when

former president Abdurahman Wachid revoked on religion, belief and ethnic of Chinese.¹ Besides different religion lives together in this country, based on Central Statistic Board, there are approximately 1, 000 ethnicity exists in Indonesia.² It is a big number compare to other multicultural country like United States of America.

Diversity is a blessed to Indonesia; it could be one of attraction point for creating an image to global community. Yet, it is also a challenge for Indonesian. Diverse culture means each ethnic and religion will have its own way in life.

When two or more ethnics or religions happened to be in a same environment, it is inevitable that the debate between them will occur. Who does not know about ethnic clash in Kalimantan years ago between Madura and Dayak. It was a sad tragedy that even for ethnics besides the one that involved in the event cannot imagine how bad the impact of the tragedy to them.³ People tends to ignore the fact during the dispute, they tend to uphold their culture without trying to compromises to other's culture. It is important to create understanding between groups in Indonesia. Small misunderstanding could lead into bigger problems that will drag even bigger crowd.

The purpose of this paper is to finding alternative for creating better understanding between ethnic and religion in Indonesia. This paper will be explained using communication and soft power concepts. Communication is action or process in which message in form of words, sounds, signs, or behaviors is being exchange or transfer to someone else.⁴ In other words, communication is an exchange of information between people. According to Shanon and Weaver model of communication, communication consists of sender, message, channel, noise and receiver.⁵ To answer question of How to improve communication between different ethnics and religions in Indonesia, the concept of communication use to understand and explain communication process between groups. It also will explain and describe how performing arts as channel between sender and receiver during the communication process.

¹ Religions in Indonesia, taken from Ilmu Pengetahuan Umum: <http://ilmupengetahuanumum.com/agama-agama-di-indonesia/> retrieved on Jul 10, 2016

² *Indonesia memiliki 1.128 suku bangsa*, taken from JPNN: <http://www.jpnn.com/berita.detail-57455>, retrieved July 12, 2016

³ *Behind the Central Kalimantan Violence*, taken from Down to Earth: <http://www.downtoearth-indonesia.org/story/behind-central-kalimantan-violence>, 2001

⁴ Communication Definition, taken from Merriam Webster: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>

⁵ Shanon and Weaver Model of Communication, taken from Communication Theory: <http://communicationtheory.org/shannon-and-weaver-model-of-communication/>, retrieved July 14, 2016

The next concept use to understand the research question above is the concept of soft power. Power is the ability to achieve purpose or goal by making others do something they would not do.⁶ Simply, power is skill to influence other to do something in order to get what we want. According to Joseph Nye, soft power is the ability in using attraction.⁷ This attraction is related to the intangible characteristic of people or group in form of personality, culture, and values. In this paper, the use of soft power is to achieve one's goal, which is to make others understand or simply compromise upon one's different culture. Cultural exchange is one of means in exercising soft power. This paper will focus on performing arts and how it will accommodate cultural exchange between different ethnic and religion in Indonesia.

Performing Arts As Tools To Improve Communication Between Ethnic And Religions

Performing arts has been practiced in many cultures and countries. Each of country has their roots and history regarding their performing arts. Indonesia has many traditional performances. It is culturally rich country. Wayang or puppet has been performed since long time ago, even before the independent of Indonesia as nation-state. This type of performance arts spread in Java Island.⁸ In addition, performing arts has been use in many forms of political, social, cultural relations among countries all over the globe. Cultural diplomacy done by countries to other countries is in order to create image and strengthening relations between them without the use of hard power that involving military personnel and also sanction.

Many countries around the globe have done soft power through cultural exchange. It is consider one of cost effective instrument in dealing with relations between countries.⁹ The effectiveness using soft power rather than hard power has been proved, take for example is France with *Institut Francais D'Indonesie* succeed to create better understanding to Indonesian through the exposure of arts and culture. There are increasing number of relations between France institution and universities in Indonesia

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *The Changing Nature of World Power*, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol 105, No 2, pp.177-192, Academy of Political Science, 1990

⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, 2004

⁸ *The History of Indonesian Puppet Theatre (Wayang)*, taken from Asian Art Museum: <http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/history-indonesian-puppet-theater-wayang>, retrieved July 10, 2016

⁹ Richard T. Andt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Washington DC., Potomac Books, 2005

since 2013.¹⁰ This evidence shows that the use of cultural exchange between countries could achieve certain target without using force or violence. By creating and transferring images, values, ideas through performing arts such as contemporary dance by *Kubilai Khan* Investigation or *L'oiseau* by *Les Remouleurs*, Indonesian get the message about certain values and culture through the process of communication by watching the performances. This type of soft power application in relations between two states could also use within the state to create understanding between different groups in Indonesia.

One of example how the use of performing arts in creating understanding between different ethnic and religion in Indonesia is like what has been doing by *Kiai Kanjeng* musical group. This musical group is known with its music where Gamelan uses within the performance. Gamelan is traditional musical instrument from Indonesia. What makes this group different from others is that they are performing many kinds of music genre. This type of performing arts could be related to the topic of this paper because this music group performs in many places from small village in Indonesia to the foreign countries as well where many ethnics and religion involved within the dialog creating by *Kiai Kanjeng*.¹¹ This group music is not only spreading and giving Islamic values in its performers but also connected it with modernization while at the same time avoiding judgment to other ethnic and religion.

Cultural exchange in form of performing arts is beneficial in creating conducive environment in Indonesia. It will give a healthy and fair condition to create dialog and understanding. In the process of communication, this performing arts act as channel from each ethnic and religion or groups to send their message or information to others without trying to forcing or pressuring each of them. In this modern era where information is rapidly spread through internet, people will grab the ideas or information without trying to filter it first. Modern society is being choked up by too many information that could lead to misunderstanding, especially for Indonesian where there are already so much differences and diversities within the society. Moreover, by fostering the performing arts in communication process between each group, it will create forum for different people to sit and even enjoy the performance and at the same time trying to digest information about others culture. Theatrical and visual performances could become effective channel within communication process between ethnics and religions in Indonesia. People tend to

¹⁰ France and Indonesia, taken from: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country- files/indonesia/france-and-indonesia/>, retrieved July 12, 2016

¹¹ *Kiai Kanjeng Minds*, taken from *Kiai Kanjeng*: <http://www.kiaikanjeng.com/minds/>, retrieved July 13, 2016

understand other by things that closely related to their own experience. Despite, all the differences that people have, they will definitely have the same experiences and stories during their life in Indonesia.

Fostering the cultural exchange through performing arts, especially giving the chance to young generation to be involved in the process to create better communication between ethnic and religion in Indonesia could alter the friction as well as to support young artists to be developed. Government needs to create forum for young talented artists of performing arts to be involved actively in the effort to create better society. Communication process in performing arts will likely to decrease the noise while transferring the message to receiver. This alternative to overcome friction in Indonesia is not only effective to established understanding and compromise between Indonesian, but also it gives channel for young generation to transfer their knowledge and talent. Indonesia is depending on young generation to create development as well as creating society where the next generation could grow and develop within it.

Conclusion

Managing the differences in Indonesia, whether different ethnic and religion is not a simple task to be exercised. The friction between ethnic and religions happen because the lack of communication between them. To anticipate or even minimize friction between different groups in Indonesia, it is necessary to create a better understanding in society. The misunderstanding or even less of tolerance happens mostly because each of the group has little knowledge about others. To improve understanding, the use of cultural exchange in form of visual and theatrical performances is needed to be developed. Soft power in this kind of cultural exchange is not only effective, but also creating more positive impact to the society. By fostering the cultural exchange between groups in Indonesia through cultural exchange in form of performing arts could improve the communication between different ethnic and religion in Indonesia in peaceful, less violence way. Furthermore, it creates opportunity for young generation to involve in the process. This form of cultural exchange could create benefits not only to the society as a whole but also to the young generation in creating tolerance and more understanding society.

REFERENCES

- Andt, Richard T., *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Washington D.C. , Potomac Books, 2005
- Behind the Central Kalimantan Violence*, taken from Down to Earth:
<http://www.downtoearth-indonesia.org/story/behind-central-kalimantan-violence>, 2001
- Communication Definition, taken from Merriam Webster: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>
- France and Indonesia, taken from: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/indonesia/france-and-indonesia/>, retrieved July 12, 2016
- Indonesia memiliki 1.128 suku bangsa*, taken from JPNN:
<http://www.jpnn.com/berita.detail-57455>, retrieved July 12, 2016
- Kiai Kanjeng Minds, taken from Kiai Kanjeng: <http://www.kiaikanjeng.com/minds/>, retrieved July 13, 2016
- Nye, Joseph S. 1990. *The Changing Nature of World Power*, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol 105, No 2, pp.177-192. Academy of Political Science
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs.
- Religions in Indonesia, taken from Ilmu Pengetahuan Umum:
<http://ilmupengetahuanumum.com/agama-agama-di-indonesia/> retrieved on July 10, 2016
- Shanon and Weaver Model of Communication*, taken from Communication Theory:
<http://communicationtheory.org/shannon-and-weaver-model-of-communication/>, retrieved July 14, 2016
- The History of Indonesian Puppet Theatre (Wayang)*, taken from Asian Art Museum:
<http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/history-indonesian-puppet-theater-wayang>, retrieved July 10, 2016