

## THE INTERPLAY OF CULTURE AND ECONOMY

“CULTURE” IS PROBABLY ONE of the hardest English-language words to define. Almost anything we encounter everyday—consciously or not—is part of it. Raymond Williams in his 1976 book “Culture” posited that culture “never completes or finishes. It is continuously evolving, propagating with various meanings and identities, and shaping every aspect of the society.”

As individuals and institutions, we shape and are shaped by culture. A strict approach in comprehending and analyzing it would be problematic. Either as a producer or a consumer of goods and services, we are culture-shapers. According to Williams, there are four interplays of culture and economy: negative, positive, competitive or emergent.

In the case of Indonesia, how has culture been shaping the economy or vice versa? Which cultural elements are involved, such as regional, national or international? Which is dominant: state or private? How are digitalization and globalization affecting this process? Do capitalistic interests reduce the purity of artistic and scientific elements of culture?

Despite the misunderstood notion of culture as something of the past that we inherit today, culture is more than an edifice of the past. It is a key determinant of the future. We can expect to see more interplay between digital and cross-boundary cultural elements while at the same time



private actors will gain influence at the expense of state actors. Traditional and modern cultural aspects can be expected to interact at a greater speed than two decades ago.

Bali, batik, *keris* (Javanese dagger) and gamelan immediately come to

side with modern technologies such as cell phones and television. The convergence of media such as television and the Internet also provides an unprecedented opportunity for a blended culture. Thus another question emerges: Do capitalistic interests taint artistic products?

There is no simple answer. It is both a “profit” and a “loss” whenever artistic pursuits are mixed with capitalistic interests. Using a paradigm that every cultural product has a value to users, then capitalistic interests impressively increase the opportunity in creating value.

Indonesia has an unprecedented opportunity to rise above the rest of the world. With its economic momen-

---

---

**CULTURE IS MORE THAN AN EDIFICE OF THE PAST. IT IS A KEY DETERMINANT OF THE FUTURE.**

---

---

mind as stereotypical traditional Indonesian cultural elements. Yet digitalization and globalization have created an unprecedented condition in which a direct linkage can be formed flawlessly between capitalistic interests and traditional cultural gatekeepers.

For instance, Bali, batik, *keris* and gamelan now exist in an age in which they can no longer be independently enjoyed in a conventional context—they can only exist side by

side as a new G20 member, per capita income close to \$4,000, and a 243 million-strong domestic market, we can expect to see Indonesia become an increasingly important economic force. This growth, combined with the country’s rich cultural elements, will undoubtedly raise Indonesia’s global profile. Indonesia should take advantage of its economic momentum and cultural richness to improve both its global position and the quality of life for all Indonesians. 

---

JENNIE S. BEV IS AN AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, COLUMNIST, SOCIAL ACTIVIST, TRANSNATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR, AND INDEPENDENT INTELLECTUAL BASED IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA. SHE CAN BE REACHED AT JENNIESBEV.TYPEPAD.COM.