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Performing Arts in a Historical Perspective

Performing arts, as part of the cultural fabric, is bound to be related, in whatever mode, to the structure of institutions within a society. Moreover, it is the link between institutions that gives the directions to the evolvement of needs and demands for works or activities in performing arts. The specific configurations of the interlinkages could be recognised as the traits of individual cultures. However, since people do mix with each other, even transsecting social-cultural boundaries, specific traits of one culture may become a set of shared traits between several cultures.

Performing arts has been understood as the actualisation of ideas and powers beyond the hard facts of life. It may range between the descend of supernatural power to the expression of social criticism. The sense of truth, as well as the aesthetic principles with its technical implications, make the very basic foundations for works in performing arts. In a way, a work of performing arts can be paraphrased as literature in sound and movement. Of course, "literature" in this sense must not be understood as only the narrative type, but more widely as a composition of ideas.

THE RISE OF GREAT TRADITIONS

Several among the existing cultures in the world had developed conceptual and technical means to transmit their cultural heritage beyond the ear-to-mouth procedures; the most significant technology for the transmission being the script. It has been through scriptures that ideas and values, that is the core culture, were transmitted through generations, transcending time and in many cases also geographical boundaries.

It was by means of the power of the script that great traditions arose. It had been around the use of the script that many institutions within a society had also been developed and flourished. The religious, political, educational, economic, health, as well as art institutions had been enhanced by the services of the script.

The great traditions of the world through the centuries had made up those cultures which were or are strongly integrated; some of them, among the most

ancient, had fallen into extinction, whereas some others, the more recent ones, survived until the present. In each of the cultures which has a great tradition the significance and role of performing arts was or is, in one way or another, specific and sometimes even uncomparable. This is a fact that needs more comprehension from all of us, who live in the present situation of unbalanced information.

Within the great traditions, art in its many branches had mostly been flourished through the development of sets of firm, sometimes rigorous, aesthetic principles. These aesthetic principles are comprised within the set of characterising factors of a culture. In some performing arts tradition, it can be observed that vis à vis the strict aesthetic principles, the art of improvisation had also been developed as an incorporated part of the whole tradition. Besides, within the framework of the set aesthetic principles accepted in a society, new compositions and even new genres of performances had been created. Hence, we have here the notion of "creativity within traditions." In relation with this notion, it might as well be hypothesized that great traditions lead to great creations, while actors of little traditions create rudimentarily.

MONDIALITY AS A FUNCTION OF COLONIZATION

Some nations which are bearers of great traditions, mainly that from Europe, centuries ago began to set foot on "foreign lands," to satisfy their curiosity, their explorative desires, as well as to find and possess newly found economic resources. Migrations, and henceforth colonisation, happened then in many parts of the other four continents. A part of the migrants had a special mission *sacré* to Christianise the "un-Christian" population, oftentimes also denominated as "uncivilised" or even "barbarian." Most of us came to know later on, due to studies in archaeology and cultural history, that there are or were highly developed civilisations with great traditions, even those associated with great religious teachings, in Asia, Africa, and America, which were or have been grown and tended by their respective indigenous peoples.

The more or less unified Europe of that era, being a function of the unifying factor of The Church, evolve into a nearly similar character of the influence of the European colonisers on local communities. If we leave the languages out (Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English, French), we may then see that the most important impacts of the presence and dominance of the colonisers were among others: (1) the development of the Latin script as the most accepted media for the transmission of ideas, be it for educational, scientific, religious, or artistic ends; (2) the introduction of objective and transparent scientific procedures; (3) the introduction of European school

systems; (4) the introduction of European statecraft; (5) the introduction of European dress, etc. It is to be noted, however, that the influence of European art on local cultures are very varied; it ranges between the very strong and the very weak.

Nevertheless, the common European cultural influence induced upon the multitude of nations throughout the whole world had given impetus to the formation of a likeness of universality of the Europe-based principles of many institutions. Those widely spread common principles had become mundially accepted, and henceforth used as common platforms for discourse. In some respects, for instance in the sciences, these ideational common platforms are advantageous since they smoothen communications crossnationally, heighten their effectiveness, by the use of sets of common codes. In some other respects, however, for instance in the field of ethics and the arts, biases are inherent in the imposition of the so-called common principles to peoples that in fact already have their own principles evolved within their respective cultures. This resulted frequently in mis-communications with all their detrimental implications.

In performing arts, unlike in literature and visual arts, the westernisation processes in different countries were not always deeply penetrating, except maybe for the use of the diatonic scale in music. Despite the introduction, and acceptance, of the principle of free explorations in creating works of art, such as in contemporary performing arts we are witnessing in this festival, a rich variety of culture-bound sources prevails significantly. Put in another way, the mundiality of certain ideas in pursuing art, being the aftermath of the whole colonisation processes, is in performing arts being balanced by the emergence of explorations based on the many heritages of the traditions outside Europe.

THE ERA OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

After World War II many countries were liberated from colonial rule, and thence deciding for their owns what kind of a governmental structure to develop, and what a formulation of cultural policy to promote and implement. These cultural policies of the newly formed independent states are sometimes very explicit, but in some other cases seem to be more implicitly formulated within the framework of a larger body of national matters.

After the nominally non-existence of colonial rule, or maybe better stated as the non-popularity of colonialism, the many countries in the world, be it the formerly colonising or colonised, had become equal in their status as independent countries. The rule of discourse had become then a multilateral

dialogue between nations based on equity, and no more that of an asymmetrical dialogue between the dominating and the dominated.

That mode of discourse permeates as well the artistic world. It is notable, that while the pre-war revolutionary developments in art, evolving into what is known as modern art (including performing arts) were centered in the 'western' world, on the other hand the later post-war developments, generally coined as contemporary art, had been developing itself in a multi-source basis, the source being unconfined to that of the western civilization only. It is within this last-mentioned mode of art making that the other cultures outside the 'western' world had made themselves as fully relied upon bases for contemporary works of art. In these last two decades, there have also been collaborations between artists from different nationalities, western and non-western, in which the artists were assigned equal responsibility regardless of their respective nationality.

It is this atmosphere of deeper understanding among nations that has been sought after in international festivals like the present Art Summit Indonesia, besides of course the primary objectives of these festivals which is to expose the best works of art. Encounters between artists of differing cultural backgrounds are expected to result in the realization of each other's specific problems and challenges, as well as the professional appraisal of each other's work. Audiences are also given the opportunity to nurture their souls with the subtle workings of aesthetic elements.

Aside from the direct encounters between artists and their audiences, the advancement of communication systems and informatics, as well as the rise and development of cultural industry, have given a much wider range of spectators the opportunity to delight in selected works of art. In this case, we may recognise the word "selected" as the key to enter into the problem of cultural industry. The hard fact we have at hand is that concerning the question of whom the agents of selection are. We have seen the tendency that cultural industry in general seems to put entertainment art as a priority, because it is more profit-yielding, while leaving behind those genres of serious art, which indeed need harder efforts to promote. We have also witnessed the rise of a strong cross-national networks of industries of popular entertainment art. Educational considerations in cultural industry have become a kind of anomaly, which is probably questionable. To aggravate the problem is also the fact that through cultural industry western style popular songs have imprinted such a strong influence in the youth all over the world, and at the same time estranging them from their own artistic heritage.

It is relevant to this problem of imbalance that international cooperations need always to be enhanced, and directed towards giving more weight to the

aesthetic and educational values. Festivals as well as conventional and multimedia publications are means that might be used to the utmost to correct those imbalances.

THE POSITION OF THE PERFORMING ARTIST

However, should there be a more balanced cultural industry, and especially that of works of performing arts, one should not undervalue the role of the performing artists as the agents of creation. The heart of the art is still in its kinetic and auditive aspects, shaping the actual performance in real space and time, and not in that of the virtual. Whatever success has been achieved in the promotion and dissemination of works of performing arts through industry, opportunities for actual performances, in which interpretations, explorations and creations preside, will always be the solid ground for the very existence of the art.