



## BALINESE CULTURE IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE LOBBY AND RESTAURANT at the Royal Pita Maha Resort in Ubud, Bali

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to describe the physical elements of the lobby architecture - the Royal Pita Maha resort restaurant, and furthermore to reveal the meaning of Balinese culture. According to its method, the architectural object is expressed as 'physical existence', subsequently 'aspects of purpose', and finally 'essence' in the form of Balinese cultural meaning. The shape of the resort gate is the result of re-interpretation and improvisation of the past Puri Ubud gate. The lobby architecture is the result of re-interpretation and improvisation of the Balinese traditional public building with modern construction, manifesting the harmony of past-present life. The roof is more special than the others, representing the 'three layers of nature' in Balinese culture, open space and utilizing local resources referring to the 'harmonies of nature'. The layout of the continuous lobby - restaurant towards the South - North is adapted to the condition of the original land and utilizes local natural resources, standing for 'harmonies of local nature'. The re-interpretation of Balinese Traditional communal public building architecture with modern construction patterns means 'harmony of life' between the past and present. Once again, the roof is more outstanding than the other parts, referring to the 'three layers of nature'.*

**Keyword:** *Balinese culture, meaning, harmony.*

### INTRODUCTION

Bali is known as a place that possesses unique architectural potential and thus it has become one of the easily identifiable or even iconic locations to be found (Wiryawan, 2015), especially featuring Balinese Traditional Architecture rooted in Balinese Culture and its local nature. Balinese Traditional Architecture which has lasted for centuries has obviously showcased this quintessentially Balinese identity to all corners of the world (Salain, 2019).

These days, the island of Bali has developed into one of the world's major tourist destinations. Tourism has had a considerable amount of influence on the socio-cultural life of its people, which was originally rooted in wetland agriculture and slowly shifted to tourism (Putra, 2016). Local identity has also been transmogrified, namely from a culture rooted in agriculture to the current diverse tourist area. This conspicuous change has given rise to different architectural typologies in each era (Putra, 2016).

In this global era which is based on 'ratio', dogmatic and mystical phenomena in traditional life are less understandable. This has had an impact on many traditional spatial and architectural patterns that have been abandoned by their inhabitants and turned to spatial patterns and what is called Non-Traditional Architecture or Contemporary Architecture. The architectural industry, in the name of efficiency,

effectiveness, hygiene and various other ideals, has forced traditional notions through industrialization and education.

The struggle in the name of 'tradition' and 'new change' is bound to create new identities that can dry up from the point of view of meaning (Salain, 2019). Therefore, strengthening Balinese identity through architecture must be carried out when various influences crush and attack traditional assets in the name of renewal (Salain, 2019). One ought to keep in mind that one's motivation for traveling is to see and experience life in a place that is markedly different from what one experienced at one's place of origin.

One of the world's tourist destinations is Ubud, related to the natural beauty of rice fields-forests-rivers, cultural events, Traditional Palaces (*Puri*) and Traditional Markets (Anggi, 2020). Ubud, which was originally a village of wetland paddy fields, has now developed into a dense tourist area (Halim, 2016), with the Ubud Palace being sustainable to this day (Suryono, 2023) and Ubud Art Market as its center. The existence of the Royal Pita Maha resort in Kadewatan Village, Ubud (25.4 km from Denpasar city) with its typical blend of Traditional-Modern architecture in the tropical forest area of Ubud and its 'Balinese Culture' life is still being perpetuated, and

avored by foreign tourists, providing food for an interesting discussion.

The problem is how to understand Balinese culture in the architecture of the Royal Pita Maha resort lobby-restaurant which attracts foreign tourists. This paper aims to describe the physical elements of the lobby - restaurant architecture and to subsequently reveal the meaning of Balinese culture. The understanding or interpretation of Balinese culture in contemporary architecture needs to be conveyed to the public, so that today's Balinese architecture remains rooted in Balinese culture, which has been tested for its quality and attractiveness. To be sustainable, Balinese architecture must be rooted in the past (Lombart, 2018), namely Balinese culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Royal Pita Maha Resort is a five-star resort with strong Balinese cultural influences, both visible and invisible ones. To reveal Balinese culture in the architecture of this resort, it is necessary to understand the forms of Balinese culture, namely physical systems, social systems and meaning/value systems (Koentjaraningrat, 2015), and those related to this resort are described as follows.

### Balinese Traditional Architecture

The building of the lobby and lounge of the Royal Pita Maha resort is in the architectural style of blending Traditional Balinese - Modern, while Traditional Balinese Architecture is part of the physical system of Balinese Culture. The principles of Balinese Traditional Architecture (Askara, 2018; Couteau, 2005; Davison, 2003, and Wiryawan-Swanendri, Siwalatri, 2015) regarding the Royal Pita Maha resort in the South Bali area can be summed up as follows:

1. The architectural orientation is based on cosmology, namely: 1) The natural axis runs from north to south (mountains are to the north, while the sea is to the south). The sea has a negative meaning, but it also signifies strength, a source of life, a place to purify. 2) The ritual axis is east-west (the sun rises in the east and sets in the west). 3) The vertical axis consists of the upper realms of Gods and deities (*swah*), the middle realms of humans (*bhuwah*), and the lower realms of animals and demons (*butha/bhur*).

2. Natural balance, based on the cosmological principle described above, namely vertical balance (upper - middle - lower nature), and horizontal balance (North-South direction and East-West direction). This balance is dynamic according to conditions/needs, not rigid with the same proportions, which apply at the village or house scale (Sutanta and Wiryawan, 2016).

3. The spatial hierarchy is based on three axes: 1) The further north, the more important/elevated, the middle area lies in the center (*madya*), and the south is the lower or debased (*nista*) area. 2) The further to the East, the more important/elevated, the middle forms the medium level (*madya*), while the West is low/debased (*nista*). 3) The higher up, the more important, the middle being the medium level, and the lower the debased level. In architecture, the roof

area carries the most elevated meaning, the central/middle body (room) area the medium level and the lower one is represented by the lower floor area. In fact, the main concept of *madya-nista* deals more with appropriateness/suitability, not the dichotomy of good and bad (Waterson, 1990:97).

4. Based on the hierarchy of meaning, buildings are classified as (Figure 1): a) Buildings for worship/worship of God/deities and ancestors (temples for villages, *sanggah/mrajan* for houses) that carry the most important meaning; b) Residential buildings that have an intermediate meaning, being neither elevated nor debased; c) Social/cultural buildings (*wantilan*, *bale banjar*) that stand for objects of contempt (Goris, 2012).

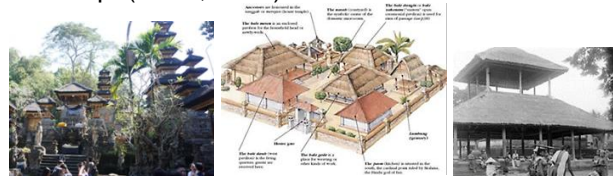


Figure 1. Worship Buildings, Traditional Houses, Public Buildings

Left: Temple worship building. Middle: Traditional Balinese house. Right: *Wantilan* public building.

(Source: Author's survey 2018, Tropenmuseum 1908 [www.crazylittlefamilyadventure.com](http://www.crazylittlefamilyadventure.com).)

5. Temples are in the form of rows of palm-roofed towers (*meru*), *Sanggah/Mrajan* in the form of small rectangular buildings with roofs of palm fiber/tiled roofs in the shape of a pyramid, generally located in the North-East direction of the yard (Contok, I Wayan, 2020).

6. Traditional Balinese houses in the form of a collection of buildings with thatched roofs, wooden construction, oriented towards an empty courtyard in the center (*Natah*). The spatial pattern is in accordance with the *utama-madya-nista* (high-medium-low or exalted-intermediate-debased) hierarchy, namely places of worship/rebuttals in the main area, everyday buildings in the middle area, entrances, and green open spaces in the lowly area. The boundary around the house is in the form of a brick/stone wall, whereas the gate has a barrier wall (*aling-aling*).

7. Traditional Balinese public buildings: *Wantilan* buildings have a rectangular shape, large size, are open to all directions, have thatched roofs, a wooden construction, and serve social/cultural/ spiritual functions of the local community. The *Bale Banjar* is also rectangular in shape but smaller in size, and is open to all directions, with a wooden construction, serving social/cultural functions as well. In Traditional Balinese Architecture, buildings are considered equal to humans, consisting of bodies and souls. The physical form is the expression, while the soul is analogous to its meaning (Sutanta, 2017), and the physical form is patterned as head/roof - body/pillar-wall - feet/floor.

### Balinese Traditional Rituals

Balinese Traditional Rituals are part of the Balinese social and cultural system, unrelated to architecture, but they do reinforce the Balinese cultural aura at the Royal Pita Maha resort, including: a) The ritual of

offering of a cup of coffee and cakes (*Mesodan*) in the morning before carrying out activities in each place of worship resort and its environment. b) The ritual of offering rice and side dishes that have not been consumed at the food court/*pelinggih* and resort grounds and giving thanks to God for the blessings of food (*Mesaiban*). c) Offerings of betelnut-lime leaves, fresh flowers, sliced sugarcane, and cake (*Mebanten canang*) at the *pelinggih* before the evening service, also constitute a form of gratitude to God for the opportunity to live. d) The wearing of Balinese traditional clothing by resort staff, in the form of simple/medium daily traditional clothing, or religious ritual clothing.

### Meaning of Balinese Culture

The meaning of Balinese culture as the soul of traditional Balinese architecture forms the philosophical basis for its form/image (Siwalatri, 2015) and the meaning of Balinese culture (Sutanta, 2017) related to the Royal Pita Maha resort in southern Bali can be described as follows:

1. The meaning of 'opposite dualism' in life (*utamanista*, upstream-downstream) which becomes one and cannot be separated from one another actually forms the basis of the law of balance (*Rwa Bhineda* philosophy). Its form takes the shape of an empty space in the middle of the building complex (symbol of meeting), in the house it is called *Natah*, and in the village it takes the form of a crossroads.
2. The meaning of 'noble' in 'mountain and sea' which is used as an orientation point (according to the *Nyegara Gunung* philosophy). Mountains occupy a high position (origin from water), while the sea has a low position (estuary from water).
3. The meaning of the 'three layers of nature' (the *Tri Loka* philosophy), namely the 'upper realm'/sky as the realm of the gods (high value), the 'middle realm'/surface of the earth as the human realm (medium value), and the 'natural' layer. under the earth (low value) (Wikipedia, 2022).
4. The meaning of local natural harmony, through the harmonious use of local resources (*Manik Ring Cucupu* philosophy).
5. The meaning of the harmony of life, through the freedom to continuously re-interpret and improvise regarding 'place - time - pattern' (*Desa Kala Patra* philosophy). Tradition is considered as a legacy that is adaptable, flexible, and one that responds to the needs of the times.
6. The meaning of the cause of peace-happiness-prosperity is created through a balanced and harmonious relationship between humans and God/deities, among humans themselves, and between humans and nature (*Tri Hita Karana* philosophy), (Peters and Wardana, 2013).

### Modern Architecture

The early Modern Architectural style broke away from the past, both in terms of its features and characteristics, and for that reason a Modern Architectural style was chosen which united old and new architecture, namely the flow of Regionalism (Curtis, 1985; Wondoamiseno, 1991). In this paper, the flow of Regionalism unites the styles of

Traditional Balinese Architecture and Modern Architecture, meanwhile, Balinese Traditional Architecture is based on Balinese Culture.

### METHOD

To reveal Balinese culture in the architecture of the Royal Pita Maha resort, architecture is seen as a real-life space, in which there are three layers of existence (Sudaryono, 2017), namely: 1) Physical existence, with elements of spatial observation, building figures, materials, carvings, and local human behavior. 2) The aspect of 'purpose/intent', which is about the 'what/why' of physical existence. 3) 'Essence', namely the meaning/soul/philosophy of Balinese Culture derived from physical existence. The stages of observation were carried out at the resort gates, lobbies and restaurants, including the elements of 'human behavior' (part of the Balinese social cultural system) which has become a daily part of this resort.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of Balinese culture in the lobby and restaurant architecture of the Royal Pita Maha resort begins with a description of the physical aspects (spatial layout, building features, materials, carvings, traditional rituals), followed by the 'purpose' aspect (about 'what' and 'why'), and finally its 'essence' (the meaning of Balinese Culture). The object of study includes the resort gate, the lobby, and the restaurant.

#### Resort Gate

The resort gate is a sandstone wall in the shape of a pair of tall slender triangles measuring decameters carved with simple patterns flanking the entrance (called *Candi Bentar*) similar to the heritage gate of the Palace/Puri Ubud in the center of Ubud. The receiving courtyard is quite wide, and large trees and flower plants grow around the gate. Places for offering prayers (*pelinggih*) for residents around the resort every morning and evening are situated on the outer-right side (Figure 2) which often attract the attention of foreign tourists. This gate also forms the entry point to residential areas around the resort.



Figure 2. Royal Pita Maha Resort Gate and Balinese Traditional Temple Gate

Left: Place of offerings (*pelinggih*) to the right of the gate, attracting the attention of tourists. Center: Resort gate, measuring dozens of meters in height, covered with vegetation. Right: Gate of the traditional Balinese *Candi Bentar* (intricate carving). (source: author's survey 2019)

The large gate is meant to welcome guests with the splendor of the Kingdom of Ubud, a form of respect paid to the last king of the Kingdom of Ubud for his services in advancing Balinese Culture during his reign (Sukawati, 2019). Large trees and flower plants around the gate provide shade and display the

beauty of natural elements for guests. The offering-praying place to the right of the gate is a form of spiritual relationship to God and local natural forces, so that there is a pleasant atmosphere exuding safety and peace in the gate area.

The layout of the gate shows a balanced-harmonious relationship between humans-humans (wide courtyard), between humans-nature (shade trees, flower plants) and humans-God/ancestors (places of prayer-offerings) signifying the cause of happiness-prosperity-peace (*Tri Hita Karana* Philosophy) of Balinese Culture. The shape and pattern of the carvings of the Puri Ubud gate in the past were re-interpreted and improvised for the present resort gate, representing the harmony of past - present life (*Desa Kala Patra* philosophy) of Balinese culture. Tradition is seen as a legacy that is adaptable, flexible, and responsive to the needs of the times.

### Lobby

The lobby building is an architectural style blend of Traditional Balinese - Modern Regionalism. The interior is spacious and open to the surrounding garden. The roof is a pyramid shape composed of reeds, made neatly without a ceiling, and the lobby area is naturally bright (Figure 3). The doorway is carved with typical Balinese sandstone, and resort guests are greeted by resort staff dressed in Balinese traditional clothing displaying Balinese cultural manners or etiquette.



Figure 3. Lobby Building

Left: Right faces of the lobby building. Center: Left faces of the lobby building. Right: Balinese traditional *Bale Wantilan*. (source: author's survey 2019)

Figure of the building representing the head - body - feet of Traditional Balinese Architecture, with the roof being more special than the post-beams and the floor (Figure 3a). All the materials and workers/craftsmen employed for the thatch roofs, wooden beams, masonry walls, sandstone carvings on doorways and walls originate from the local environment (Sukawati, 2019).



Figure 3a. Lobby Building

Left: The main doorway with three-dimensional Balinese carvings, and the resort staff welcoming guests. Center: The wide-tall-open lobby hall is surrounded by tropical gardens. Right: Wide-open lobby area, resort staff dressed in traditional Balinese attire. (Source: author 2019, Royal Pita Maha 2016 document)

The specialty of the roof against the walls of the room and the floor is the expression of the loftiest hierarchy for the nature of God/deities above the human and natural realms, representing the 'three layers of nature' of the Balinese *Tri Loka* philosophy. The

lobby architecture is open to the surrounding natural environment, as well as natural lighting through gaps or apertures in the roof structure, moreover the building materials and workers/ craftsmen from the local environment, the Balinese clothing and manners from the resort staff, all of these mean 'harmony with the local nature', according to the *Manik Ring Cucupu* philosophy of Balinese culture.

The lobby architecture is a re-interpretation of the traditional Balinese *Wantilan* architecture, wood construction into a modern steel-plywood construction (so there is no pillar in the middle of the room) signifying the 'harmony of past - present life' philosophy of the *Desa Kala Patra*, as well as preservation of Balinese culture. The architecture of the past (forms, materials, carvings) with today's technology have blended into the inseparable meaning of the 'dualistic' philosophy of *Rwa Bhineda* of Balinese Culture.

### Restaurant

The restaurant constitutes the end of a continuous-open layout from the South to the North side of the four buildings, namely the entrance - lobby - hall - lounge - restaurant. The restaurant, three floors down, opens onto the resort gardens below and the Ayung river valley (Figure 4). Each of these buildings displays a head-body-foot pattern, with features on the head/roof of the lobby and restaurant buildings, according to their role as the 'recipient' and 'final destination' of restaurant guests.

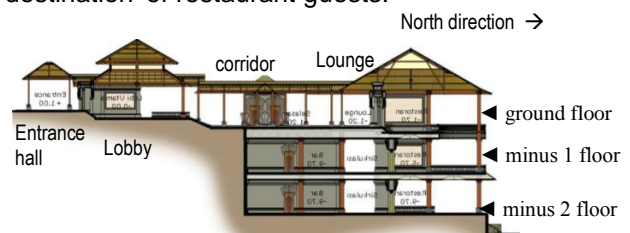


Figure 4. Drawings of Entrance hall - Lobby - Hallway and Lounge - three-storeyed Restaurant Sections of the building towards the South - North (Source: author 2019)

The continuous layout - descending gradually from two one-storey buildings on the South side and two three-storey buildings down on the North side is a form of adaptation of the building to steep ground. The shape of the original land is relatively unchanged so that the stability of the land is not disturbed, and the three-floor restaurant on the North side (as the main hierarchy) is open to nature, so that the natural beauty of the Ayung rivers can be enjoyed to the fullest. The arrangement of the receiving room in the South - the main room in the North is in keeping with the hierarchy of the Natural Axis of Traditional Balinese Architecture.

The architectural style combines Balinese Traditional - Modern Regionalism, namely the architectural principle of the Traditional Balinese *Bale Banjar* with modern technology (construction of steel beams) being overlaid with wood so that the number of pillars required is less, and the traditional Balinese characteristics are still felt (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Three-floor Restaurant

Left: Carved doorway and wall. Middle: Ground floor restaurant. Right: Restaurant floor -2, floor -1, ground floor open to the Ayung river valleys. (Source: author 2019, Royal Pita Maha 2016 document)

Spatial planning based on the 'Natural Axis' of Traditional Balinese Architecture and adapted to the original soil conditions, utilizing local natural beauty, as well as the use of local natural materials (reeds, wood, sandstone walls) and carried out by local workers means 'harmonies of nature' in keeping with the local philosophy of *Manik Ring Cucupu* of Balinese Culture.

The re-interpretation and improvisation of Balinese Traditional *Bale Banjar* Architecture (one floor) for a three-floor resort restaurant today on the edge of a riverbank with a steel-plywood construction pattern signifies the 'harmony of past - present life', according to the philosophy of Bali's Culture *Desa Kala Patra*. That *alang-alang* roof without a ceiling (neat, smooth, meticulously crafted) is more special than the walls of the room and the floor, representing 'three layers of nature', namely the layers of the divine realm (loftiest value) - the human realm (medium value) - the underworld (lowest value of the *Tri Loka* philosophy of Balinese Culture.

## CONCLUSION

The gate of the resort is the result of a re-interpretation and improvisation of the shape and pattern of carvings from the old *Puri Ubud* temple gate, standing for the 'past - present life harmony' in keeping with the *Desa Kala Patra* philosophy. The layout of the gateway which is balanced-harmonious in the relationship between humans - nature - God/ancestors manifests 'the cause of happiness-prosperity-peace' in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*.

The lobby architecture is a re-interpretation of the Balinese Traditional *Wantilan* (Pavilion) with a modern steel-plywood construction which represents the harmony of past - present life according to the *Desa Kala Patra* philosophy, and is derived from the 'opposite dualism' philosophy of *Rwa Bhineda*. The special roof (a natural symbol of God/deities) more than any other part symbolizes the 'three layers of nature' of the *Tri Loka* philosophy. The layout that is open to the garden around and utilizes local resources means Harmony-Concord with the local nature of the philosophy of *Manik Ring Cucupu*.

The continuous spatial layout of the lobby - restaurant corresponds to the Natural Axis in a South - North direction, descending gradually according to the condition of the original land, and the utilization of the beauty-function of natural resources is a manifestation of the 'harmony-concord with local nature' philosophy of *Manik Ring Cucupu*. The re-interpretation of Balinese Traditional *Bale Banjar* architecture with a modern construction pattern of

steel plywood signifies the harmony of past - present life, the philosophy of the *Desa Kala Patra*. The *alang-alang* roof which is more special (a symbol of the divine realm) than the other parts stands for the 'three layers of nature' of the *Tri Loka* philosophy.

Based on the discussion above, appreciation-utilization of local natural resources from the past 'agricultural culture' is still relevant for today's natural-cultural 'culture of tourism', whose main source originates from the natural beauty and culture of the local community. The harmony with the local nature and the culture of the people is preserved.

Furthermore, utilizing and caring for nature and harmonious relations with others as a form of gratitude to God (for His blessings) from the past 'agricultural culture' are also still relevant for today's 'culture of tourism'. There is a dynamic balance-harmony in the human-nature-God relationship. Besides signifying 'the cause of happiness-prosperity-peace', its vernacular style can also turn it into a unique current tourist attraction for foreigners.

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