

Research Article

Comical Attractions of Hanoman as Commercial Tractive Power of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu Bali

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Abstract.

The article examines the commercial tractive power of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu Bali. Kecak Ramayana has become tourism commodity since 1930s, thanks to I Wayan Limbak and Walter Spies. One of characters in Kecak Ramayana is Hanoman, considered as the most attractive character. The Ramayana Story is a sacred epic recounting the struggle of Sri Rama against the evil of Rahwana, King of Alengka. Foreign tourists love this story and seem fairly enthusiastic to see the show. The number of foreigners who come to see Kecak Ramayana has increased every year, impacting the commercialization of Kecak Ramayana as tourism art. The tractive power behind the show becomes the question that warrants exploration. The research methodology employs observational qualitative descriptive, gathering data from interview and field observation. Data analysis involves two techniques, namely visual textual descriptive and interpretative. The result of research consists of three aspects, respectively (1) the role of Hanoman character in Kecak Ramayana, (2) the comedic allure of Hanoman as spectator decoy, and (3) the impact of Hanoman's comedic appeal on the commercial success of Kecak Ramayana.

Keywords: kecak Ramayana, tourism commodity, tourism art.

1. Introduction

The presentation of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu is usually on the afternoon from 5 pm to 7 pm of Central Indonesia Time (*WITA*). Sometimes, additional schedule is given which is from 8 pm to 9 pm. The number of spectators is not less than 700-900 persons for every show. As explained by the Secretary of Kecak Ramayana Community, Chari Antara, foreign and domestic tourists are quite enthusiastic to see Kecak Ramayana in the environment of Pura Uluwatu. These spectators seem willing enough to spend

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more or less 1-1.5 hours in a road just to arrive at Pura Uluwatu, which is located quite far from Denpasar, the capital of Bali. Very often, tourists come in a group with a bus or ride on travel agency's van that commutes from their lodge to Pura Uluwatu. This situation is confirmed by I Putu Adhis Putra Kencana et al. through an article titled with *Identity of Kecak Touristic Performance in Uluwatu Temple*. The article describes that the number of spectators who watch over Kecak Ramayana is always plentiful [11].

Moreover, the authors of the current research feel assure that the topic of article is already appropriate and capable of giving contribution to the discipline of tourism performing arts. There are three factors with great effect on dramaturgy performing art, respectively (1) performer, (2) creative process and (3) spectator [13]. The quality of performer is closely related with creative process required to produce the show. Later, the show as the final outcome of this relationship will be responded by the spectator. In addition, the authors had once observed a ballet training in Kampung Budaya Palawijen Malang. The ballet is titled with *Hanoman Gandrung*. Interestingly, Hanoman character in this ballet is not presented as a strong and robust figure but as a naughty and annoying monkey [14]. Following up this observation, the current research is focusing on Hanoman character in Kecak Ramayana of Pura Uluwatu, which is not presented as a strong and powerful figure but as a comical jester. Humorous impersonation of any character in performing arts has been proven to be a tractive power of any show because spectators perceive this as amusing.

2. Method of Research

Research approach is observational qualitative descriptive [15], which requires the authors of the current research to embark on observation and build interaction with the performers of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu. The reason behind the choosing of this research subject is that Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu is a tourism performing art that successfully draws many domestic and foreign tourists to come to Bali [6]. Actually, Kecak Ramayana has been performed on various places in Bali but the most unique and spectacular is Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu [1]. Three distinctive markers of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu are that (1) the show is presented on open stage nearby abrupt cliff, (2) spectators can enjoy sunset at the end of the show, and (3) the show is held in the environment of Pura Uluwatu which is considered sacred and divine [16] [17].

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result of Research

According to I Nyoman Suganda, the early dancer for Hanoman character in Kecak Ramayana of Pura Uluwatu, Hanoman is described as a character with power, robustness, honesty and loyalty. Therefore, Hanoman is always played as protagonist character (Suganda, interview in 2023). Also explained by I Made Sedia, a choreographer and also a popular young puppeteer, Hanoman is honest and loyal to Rama. The assignment from Rama that requires Hanoman to go to Alengka is conducted in the best effort. Regarding this matter, the authors had once made a publication concerning Hanoman in an article titled with *Aesthetical Transformation on Ramayana Stories of Indonesia-Thailand Versions*. The article explains the characteristics of Hanoman character. Final conclusion of the article underscores that Hanoman character presented on Ramakien in Thailand, Ramayana Ballet in Prambanan and Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu is principally similar, which is displayed as a strong, powerful, loyal, honest and courageous character. All these personalities constitute heroism characteristic which is the prominent point in Ramayana Story [22].

The gate climbing attraction corroborates the brave appearance of Hanoman character. In current days, this attraction is done by Agus Syantara, the successor of I Nyoman Suganda. As the predecessor said, in 2000s, many Hanoman dancers explore various possible attractions to make Kecak Ramayana become more attractive. For instance, there is one scene when Hanoman must meet Sinta in Taman Sari. Before talking to Sinta, Hanoman is described as sneaking into the palace park and hiding behind the trees. On the stage, Hanoman dancer analogizes the spectators as the trees which thus require the dancer to take position in the crowd. Certainly, this situation triggers various reactions from spectators. Some are afraid but some others are happy. Even, few spectators are quite responsive and willing to participate in the scene. During the interaction with spectators, the dancer imitates the moves of monkey such as searching louse in the hair of spectators or taking a seat between the spectators. As the time goes, the comical attractions become the favorite moment that the spectators wait for willingly (Suganda, interview 2023).

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The role of Hanoman character in Kecak Ramayana

As the lead character, Hanoman gets more dominant appearance including when Rama sends Hanoman to meet Sinta, Hanoman wages war, and Hanoman kills Rahwana. Spectators' eyes are captivated by various actions of Hanoman. One of these actions is climbing the gate of Candi Bentar which makes Hanoman as the center of attention. Semiotically, this is a kind of visual assertion that directs spectators' eyes to follow Hanoman, including when Hanoman jumps down from the gate. On the other scenes, Hanoman is presented as the character with agility, strength and robustness that can break through the strict guarding of the giant soldiers in Alengka Kingdom.

3.2.2. The Comical Attractions of Hanoman as Spectator Decoy

Comical attractions begin when Hanoman dancer approaches the spectators. The real intention is to hide among the spectators to spy on Sinta. But, spectators become quite reactive to the presence of Hanoman among them.



Figure 1: Hanoman searching for louses on bald spectator. (Documentation photograph by the authors).

One comical attraction in Kecak Ramayana of Pura Uluwatu is when Hanoman dancer searching for louses on bald spectator, as depicted in Figure 1. Although the nature of this comical attraction is paradoxical, the idea of searching for louses on bald spectator

is amusing. Some of the spectators spontaneously use their smartphone to take picture of the scene whereas some others are just laughing.

Despite becoming the inspiration of Hanoman dancer, long-tail monkeys often behave in unforeseen way. The monkeys jump, climb and go down along the handrail at the right and left of the tribune, and even sneak into the crowd spectators. While hiding between spectators, Hanoman dancer must be responsive and sensitive to spectators' expectation. The dancer can act of searching louses in spectators' hair or asking spectators to take picture. This comical attraction is very short with no less than 15 minutes but this attraction leaves a pleasant moment. New spectators are usually find a hard way to forget such funny consolation.

3.2.3. The Impact of the Comical Attractions of Hanoman on the Commercial Success of Kecak Ramayana

Comical attractions presented by Hanoman character has imparted commercial impact. This statement is valid because the number of tourists has increased since 2000s after the introduction of these comical attractions. Technically, every Hanoman dancer starts to develop new understandings concerning their thematic roles. At least, the dancer must know that Hanoman character not only plays protagonist roles signified by robustness, honesty and gallantry. On the other hand, Hanoman is also described as a cunning, teasing and annoying monkey. Any dancer who play Hanoman character must understand the environment that overshadow the stage in Pura Uluwatu. The dancer should know how to imitate the behavior of long-tail monkeys that dwell at the environment of Pura Uluwatu. Most importantly, every Hanoman dancer needs to have conscience regarding the difference between presentation space and spectator space. Presentation space is where Hanoman dancer comprehends the story whereas spectator space is where the dancer releases the expression of monkey. Spectators are show commodity and thus building interaction with spectators is always important. This interaction and good response from spectators contribute the commercial success of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu.

4. Conclusion

Taking all three aspects above into consideration, the authors of the current research conclude that Hanoman character in Kecak Ramayana of Pura Uluwatu presents unique moves and expressions that represent the environment surrounding Pura Uluwatu.

Hanoman dancer is required to explore responsive ideas and build interaction with spectators during the show. Comical attractions are played in order to console spectators and get their appreciation. These comical attractions have commercial impact. Hanoman dancer must realize that their previous technical understandings concerning Hanoman dance should change. Nowadays, Hanoman dancer is also required to have understandings about thematic role, environmental response, presentation space, spectator space, and interactive response. All these understandings constitute an important factor that determines the commercial success of Kecak Ramayana in Pura Uluwatu Bali.

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