

Cultural Commodification in Cultural Tourism: A Case Study of Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the practice of cultural commodification as a strategic approach to revitalize museum-based cultural tourism, focusing on the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum in Pacitan, East Java. The research investigates how cultural elements, particularly *wayang beber*, are transformed into tourism attractions that appeal to contemporary audiences. Drawing on an exploratory qualitative method, data were collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with the museum's founder, Indra Suroinggeno, complemented by literature reviews of relevant academic works and cultural tourism reports. The findings reveal two key forms of commodification: *Wayang Beber Pancasila*, which integrates national ideological values into traditional visual narratives, and *Kerta Dluwang*, a handmade paper medium repurposed as both artwork and merchandise. These adaptations function not only as economic assets, but also as communicative tools to reintroduce local philosophy and cultural identity to the public. Rather than diminishing authenticity, the commodification at Sekartaji Museum serves as a medium for cultural reinterpretation—balancing preservation with innovation. This study underscores that when rooted in community agency and cultural knowledge, commodification can contribute to museum sustainability, increase visitor engagement, and strengthen the socio-cultural position of traditional art forms within the tourism landscape.

Keywords: Commodification, Cultural Tourism, Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum

INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is tourism that emphasizes cultural aspects as a tourist destination that provides unique experiences for tourists. According to Junaid (2014), cultural tourism refers to activities carried out by tourists who temporarily leave their daily routines to gain knowledge and experiences from cultural sources that have been curated into destinations. Damayanti and Puspitasari (2024) state that cultural tourism is currently one of the most popular forms of tourism. One way to experience cultural tourism is by visiting museums.

However, in practice, museum-based tourism in Indonesia faces challenges, particularly the perception of museums as mere warehouses for ancient objects, which leads to low public interest, especially among youth. This perception limits museums' potential as spaces for living culture and participatory education. In response, several institutions have adopted strategies of cultural



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commodification to attract public attention. Junaid (2017) explains that tourists visiting museums are part of cultural tourism activities, while Lambert (in Junaid, 2017) categorizes them into “museum tourists” and “museum visitors.” According to the KBBI, a museum is a building used for the permanent exhibition of noteworthy objects such as historical relics, art, scientific materials, and ancient artifacts.

This study focuses on the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum in Pacitan, East Java, as a case study of cultural commodification in Javanese museum tourism. *Wayang Beber*, a classical form of visual storytelling in Javanese culture, holds deep philosophical meaning such as values of *eling lan waspada* (mindfulness and vigilance) and *tatakrama* (civility), yet its position is increasingly marginalized in modern tourism discourse. This research aims to explore how the museum commodifies culture through creative strategies such as the development of *Wayang Beber Pancasila* and the use of *Kerta Dluwang* as both educational tools and marketable products.

Using an exploratory qualitative approach, this study draws on data from field observation and interviews with the museum's founder, Indra Suroinggeno. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of commodification, cultural messaging, and audience engagement. Although the primary informant was one individual, triangulation was strengthened by reviewing supporting literature, documentation, and media coverage. Methodologically, this study refers to Creswell (2013) and Bungin (2020) regarding qualitative research design, emphasizing contextual depth and interpretive meaning.

Through this lens, the research critically examines whether commodification in this context reduces the cultural essence of *wayang beber*, or conversely, functions as a form of adaptation that supports cultural sustainability. The findings contribute to the discourse on cultural commodification and museum tourism by offering a grounded perspective on how local traditions can be preserved, reimagined, and communicated in a tourism economy without losing their philosophical and cultural integrity.

The general public's view of the museum as a place to store ancient objects has an impact on the decline in tourist interest in visiting the museum. Museums are often identified as boring places (Juwita et al., 2020). Museums are also seen as buildings with a haunted and creepy impression and are seen as static and conservative buildings (Facrureza & Vinessia, 2020). On the one hand, the museum is actually a tourist destination that provides educational and historical value. According to Sinurat et al (2020) Museums also store various kinds of knowledge in the form of historical and cultural knowledge. Museums are not just cultural tourist attractions but also educational tourism. Prasetyo et al (2021) state that the use of museums as educational tourism is still not familiar.

The view and lack of interest of tourists to travel to museums is a separate problem related to cultural tourism in the context of sustainable tourism. In sustainable tourism, of course, it is necessary to pay attention to the wants and needs of tourists (Woyo and Slabbert in Firmansyah et al., 2024). According to Asmelash and Kumar in Firmansyah et al (2024) tourist satisfaction is an indicator of the

success of sustainable tourism.

Problems in museum-based cultural and educational tourism in the context of sustainable tourism are felt by almost all museums in Indonesia. Bartolomeus Herawan Mintardjo (2022), in his research, explains challenges faced by the Radya Pustaka Museum in implementing educational tourism within a sustainable museum-based tourism framework. Similarly, Putri (2021) notes that visitor interest in cultural tourism at Puro Pakualaman remains low compared to other tourist destinations in Yogyakarta. This issue is also experienced by the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum, located in Bantul, which seeks to sustain its function as both a repository of cultural heritage and a space for meaningful public engagement.

Unlike conventional museums, the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum centers its identity on *wayang beber*, one of the oldest forms of Javanese storytelling. Unlike *wayang kulit* which involves puppetry performance behind a screen, *wayang beber* uses scrolls of illustrated scenes unrolled as a narrator tells the story. These scrolls embody philosophical and moral teachings—such as *kawicaksanan* (wisdom), *eling lan waspada* (awareness and vigilance), and *budi pekerti* (ethics)—that once played a vital role in Javanese education and communal reflection. However, in the era of industrialized and image-driven tourism, such traditional and contemplative art forms are often seen as less appealing or “unsellable” compared to more visually dynamic or entertainment-based attractions.

This tension places the museum in a difficult position: how to remain culturally authentic while adapting to new modes of visibility and audience expectations. The *Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum* therefore becomes a relevant case to explore how cultural commodification—when rooted in local values—might offer both challenges and opportunities in preserving philosophical depth while engaging with the modern tourism industry.

Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is a museum that stores a variety of collections with the main collection of wayang beber and wayang beber pancasila as a masterpiece collection (interview, 2024). The Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum was founded in 2017 by Indra Suroinggeno. As a relatively new museum, of course, in the process it experienced various obstacles. These obstacles include how to promote and foster public interest in visiting the Museum (interview, 2024).

As a step to answer these challenges, the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is commodifying culture as an attraction in the context of sustainable tourism. Commodification from the basic word commodity, commodification is the process of turning any object or thing into a commodity that is traded (Barker & Emma A. Jane, 2021). According to Messianik (2023) cultural commodification is to view every culture as having exchange value. So that the concept of cultural commodification is an activity of the process of modifying or transforming culture into a commodity item. In terms of tourism, culture is modified as a tourist destination attraction.

Previous studies related to commodification in the context of tourism and museum tourism include the following: 1) Siswanto, et al (2024) in their research explained about the existence of cultural

commodification in Kampung Naga tourist destination located in West Java, 2) Gusnadi (2019) in his research discusses the commodification of traditional Sundanese art in order to attract cultural tourism in the city of Bandung, 3) Sugiyarto and Amaruli (2018) in their research describe the need for cultural-based tourism development and local wisdom in the Jepara area.

From some of the descriptions above, researchers are interested in researching the existence of cultural commodification in cultural tourism in the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum. In addition to the description above, research related to cultural commodification in cultural tourism at the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum has never been done so that this research can be continued.

METHODS

This research adopts an exploratory qualitative approach with a critical paradigm, aiming to analyze the practice of cultural commodification as a form of strategy in developing museum-based cultural tourism. The critical paradigm was chosen to uncover the underlying power relations and cultural negotiations that occur when traditional heritage, such as *wayang beber*, is transformed into a tourism commodity. The study focuses on the commodification practices carried out at the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum, particularly how cultural expressions are curated, packaged, and offered as tourist attractions.

The primary data in this study consists of observations and interview transcripts related to commodification activities at the museum. Secondary data sources include books, previous research, media coverage, and official documents that provide contextual and historical background on *wayang beber* and cultural tourism development in Indonesia.

Data collection techniques include direct field observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The main informant is Mr. Indra Suroinggeno, the founder and head of the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum, who has deep knowledge and long-standing experience in preserving and promoting *wayang beber*. Due to the limited number of key informants, the study acknowledges its limitation in triangulation. However, this limitation is mitigated by incorporating documentary sources, cross-checking between observation and interview data, and applying reflexive validation during data interpretation, as suggested by Creswell (2013) and Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014).

The data were analyzed using a thematic descriptive analysis method. This process involved identifying recurring patterns, symbols, meanings, and practices related to commodification, both in verbal narratives and observed activities. Themes were constructed inductively based on grounded field findings and later interpreted using the lens of commodification theory, which views cultural products not only as economic assets but also as carriers of ideological and symbolic value (Cohen, 1988; Appadurai, 1996).

Through this methodological framework, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and critical understanding of how commodification can be a double-edged process—offering both opportunities for revitalization and risks of decontextualization. The approach allows the study to

explore not only the surface-level outcomes of cultural commodification but also its deeper implications for cultural meaning, community empowerment, and heritage sustainability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Wayang Beber Pancasila and Dluwang Paper

Historically, wayang beber is considered the original form of wayang and is called wayang beber because in the performance it is in the form of pictures that are spread or spread out (Mertosudono in Maharsi, 2018). In the 13th century during the Majapahit period, wayang beber art was a popular spectacle and one of the most anticipated spectacles by the audience (Sayid in Kumara, 2020). As in other arts, wayang beber has experienced development and change and has undergone transformation from time to time. Evidence of the development of wayang beber is the birth of various kinds of wayang beber with all the diversity and uniqueness of each.

In the development of wayang beber, the most striking thing is the transformation of the story. The transformation of the story is in order to introduce traditional art to the current generation with the wrapping of contemporary stories and stories that are as interesting as possible (Mahardhika et al., 2020). One of the results of the development of other wayang beber is the birth of wayang beber pancasila by Indra Suroinggeno. Wayang beber pancasila is formed from the development of wayang beber stories sourced from the Sutasoma book which represents the values of Pancasila (interview 2024). Wayang beber pancasila is a masterpiece collection from the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum.

Wayang beber is painted on paper called *dluwang* paper. Dluwang paper is a traditional paper derived from the fibers of the *daluang* tree bark (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) (Cahyaningtyas & Winarno, 2023) which is made by forging it until it is smooth and becomes a sheet of paper (interview 2024). Apart from being a material or medium for painting wayang beber, *dluwang* paper is also commonly used as a writing medium. The use of *dluwang* paper as a writing medium is often found in ancient manuscripts. *Dluwang* paper is a durable and long-lasting paper and an original product of Javanese local wisdom (interview, 2024).

Commodification strategies as a cultural attraction in Tourism at the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum

Tourism as an industry is certainly very dependent on the interest of tourists. The higher and more tourists who visit tourist destinations is one indicator of the success of tourism itself. Factors that influence tourist interest include tourist attractions, accessibility and amenity packaged in tourism products tailored to market demand (Saepullah & Himawan, 2024). Attractions are the most important part of the tourism industry. Attractions play an important role in motivating tourists to visit a destination (Pitana & Diarte in Saepullah & Himawan, 2024).

In the era of postmodernism, the commodification of cultural heritage has become a widespread phenomenon, coinciding with the global growth of cultural tourism. As Lemy et al. (2024) explain,

cultural heritage attractions increasingly occupy an ambivalent position—on one hand, they preserve and promote culture, while on the other, they risk reducing it to a spectacle or commercial product. Within this dynamic, commodification emerges as both an opportunity and a dilemma in the development of sustainable cultural tourism.

At the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum, commodification manifests in two main forms: the creation of *Wayang Beber Pancasila* and the production of *dluwang* (traditional handmade paper) as merchandise. These innovations serve as tools to attract public interest, especially among younger and non-local visitors, while also offering new economic opportunities for the museum's sustainability. However, this raises critical questions: Does commodifying sacred or philosophical cultural forms dilute their meaning? Or can such efforts be interpreted as cultural adaptation—a way for heritage to survive and stay relevant?

According to Greenwood (1989), commodification in tourism tends to strip cultural expressions of their original context and spiritual significance, turning them into mere performances for economic gain. In contrast, Cohen (1988) argues that commodification is not inherently negative; its impact depends on how the community negotiates meaning and control over the cultural product. Meanwhile, Appadurai (1996) reminds us that cultural objects are not fixed in value, but are “in motion,” and their meanings shift depending on context, audience, and circulation.

In the case of Wayang Beber Sekartaji, commodification appears to be more aligned with cultural adaptation rather than exploitative capitalism. The transformation of wayang narratives into *Wayang Beber Pancasila* reflects an effort to embed national ideological values within traditional formats, thereby making them more relatable to modern audiences while preserving core narrative structures. Likewise, *dluwang* is not merely reproduced for commercial gain but positioned as an extension of cultural storytelling, integrating material history with artistic expression.

Nevertheless, the boundary between adaptation and reduction remains delicate. While some meanings are recontextualized for contemporary relevance, there is a risk that surface-level engagement may override deeper cultural reflection. Thus, critical awareness is needed to ensure that commodification serves cultural empowerment, not merely economic consumption.

In conclusion, the commodification practices at the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum illustrate a negotiated space where cultural values, economic needs, and tourism demands intersect. When managed with cultural consciousness and community agency, commodification can function as a strategy of resilience. Preserving not only objects but also the meanings, memories, and identities they carry.

The form of commodification that exists in the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is by making wayang beber as a museum collection item and being used as a tourism industry. In addition, commodification is done by making wayang beber as an attraction in the form of performances presented in tour packages. The story that is often held in tour packages is wayang beber pancasila

which takes stories from the Sutasoma book. The *wayang beber* performance presented as a tourist attraction is modified in such a way both from the duration, language of introduction and the story taken (Interview, 2024).

In addition to the *wayang beber* performances, the tourist attractions at the Wayang Beber Museum Sekartaji are in the form of drawing together on *dluwang* paper. Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum provides experience and provides education to tourists about the making of *wayang beber* puppets using *dluwang* paper (see Figure 1). Visitors are invited to try drawing and painting on *dluwang* paper and the results of the drawing can be taken home by visitors as souvenirs.

Figure 1. Souvenir and Dluwang Paper Making Tools

Source: Doc. Hery Riyanto 2024



Another attraction at the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is the making of *dluwang* paper as well as planting *dluwang* tree seedlings. Visitors are also allowed to come and try how the process of making *dluwang* paper. Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum also provides other souvenirs in the form of ready-to-use *dluwang* paper and *dluwang* tree seeds. Sales of *dluwang* paper and *dluwang* tree seeds are also carried out online to various places and even abroad.

Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is often used as a gathering place and activity for the script and manuscript community in Yogyakarta. In addition, the museum also doubles as a place to learn art, especially wayang beber and other traditional arts. The art studio sheltered by the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is called Sanggar Buana Alit. Indirectly, the existence of art studios and activities in the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum is also a special attraction for tourists to visit the museum. The tour packages offered by Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum are not only related to the museum. The packages offered extend to various other tourist attractions such as: children's *reog*, live cooking *serabi*, explore the village, fruit fermentation workshops and traditional dishes with the main attractions in the form of *wayang beber* and *dluwang* paper workshops.

In addition to the attractions presented in various tour packages, Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum regularly holds annual activities in the form of *merti wayang beber*, especially *wayang beber pancasila*, carnivals and festivals. The event is held every June 1 to coincide with the birthday of Pancasila (Interview, 2024). The various kinds of attractions offered by the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum management have a positive impact on the continuity of cultural preservation, especially *wayang beber*. This is in line with the concept of sustainable tourism in the form of preserving nature and culture in the context of national development (Saepullah & Himawan, 2024). The existence of various kinds of events or attractions in museum-based cultural tourism destinations at the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum has fulfilled the requirements for attractions that attract tourists. These requirements are in the form of something to do, something to see and something to buy (Yoeti in Wahyuni, et. al, 2024).

Furthermore, the manager of the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum revealed that the construction of the museum and these attractions was in order to maintain the great heritage of wayang beber which was already rare so that its sustainability was maintained. Attractions are carried out in order to refresh and introduce puppets to tourists and museum visitors. This is wrapped in the slogan “*tak kenal maka tak wayang*” (interview, 2024).

Figure 2. Award Certificate
Doc. Hery Riyanto 2024



Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum also supports, opens and invites students and researchers to conduct research at the Museum. Not a few museum visitors are not just traveling but also on vacation while learning. For these various innovations, the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum received a certificate of appreciation from the exploring community in 2022 as a Creative Museum (see Figure 2).

CONCLUSIONS

Museum-based cultural tourism still faces low public interest compared to other cultural destinations, largely due to perceptions of museums as outdated and unengaging. This challenge is also experienced by the Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum. To address this, the museum implements cultural commodification strategies, offering attractions such as *wayang beber* performances and *dluwang* paper workshops through curated tour packages.

This commodification is not merely economic but functions as a cultural strategy aligned with the principles of sustainable tourism. By transforming heritage elements into accessible tourism experiences, the museum plays an active role in preserving and revitalizing local cultural expressions. The initiatives promote the continued relevance of *wayang beber* and *dluwang*, while also empowering the local community through participation and cultural pride.

This research contributes to the discourse on cultural commodification in museum contexts by demonstrating that, when rooted in local agency and cultural sensitivity, commodification can serve as a form of adaptive preservation rather than cultural reduction. The Wayang Beber Sekartaji Museum case illustrates how commodification, if thoughtfully managed, can bridge traditional heritage with contemporary tourism demands, ensuring both cultural sustainability and community engagement.

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