

Traditional Myth and Culture Tourism in Bali

Igao Mahagangga^{1*}, Agung Suryawan Wiranatha², I Nyoman Sunarta³, I Putu Anom⁴

Udayana University, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4}
Jimbaran, Badung Regency, Bali Province, 80361, Indonesia
Corresponding Email: okamahagangga@unud.ac.id¹
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0431-3560>¹

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism in Bali has begun to be forgotten, despite the fact that the first arrival of tourists in the past was driven by a unique culture, an exotic community, and a way of life different from their origins, including traditional myths or local myths. This qualitative research focuses on understanding traditional myths as cultural capital in tourism and whether they still hold power in tourism development, especially through tour guides at tourist destinations through focus observations, in-depth interviews, and literature studies. The research results indicate that at present, cultural tourism has become a symbol with minimal practice in tourism products. The existence of Balinese traditional myths in tourism is threatened by tourism practitioners, such as tour guides, who simply follow market trends and believe that many tourists no longer appreciate traditional myths as they once did. There is a need to raise awareness and return cultural tourism to its roots through traditional myths. The role of local government and other tourism stakeholders is urgent and crucial. In addition, for the younger generation, traditional myths, which contain many hidden moral messages, will be useful for sustainable tourism development. This makes it possible to develop tourism without building splendor and dense infrastructure, but rather by optimizing the traditional myths that already exist throughout Bali.

Keywords: Cultural Capital; Culture Tourism; Tourism Development; Tourism Practitioner; Tour Guide; Traditional Myth

INTRODUCTION

Balinese tourism was historically famous for cultural tourism. Early tourists were drawn by the unique culture and way of life that differed from their own. It appears impossible to separate tourism and culture in the development of Balinese tourism. Unfortunately, the current tourism landscape in Bali seems to have moved away from cultural tourism due to the rising appeal of other types of tourism from an economic and business perspective.

This shift is related to how the concept of cultural tourism is utilized by Indonesian policymakers and how it differs in practice. The concept of cultural tourism weakens the difference between authentic Balinese culture and the potentially destructive forces of the modern tourist industry. Balinese culture has been commodified as a commercial product, linking its fate to the tourist industry (Picard, 1995; Vickers, 2013). With the exponential rise in tourist numbers, this relationship has become increasingly significant (Verheijen & Putra, 2020).

Bali still has many traditional myths as cultural capital, but these are no longer developed as seriously as before. Over the past fifty years, tourism development in Bali has appeared to focus more on economic growth, often ignoring traditional myths. Whereas, cultural tourism has transformed the small island into a major tourist destination, leveraging tradition as cultural capital.

At present, although Bali is still renowned for cultural tourism (albeit within a mass tourism paradigm), traditional myths as a foundation for tourism development have generally attracted little interest from tourism practitioners. Almost every village in Bali has its own myth, but these have yet to be fully realized for tourism purposes. Traditional myths that are known to tourists are typically those tied to already popular cultural tourism attractions. In the wave of new tourism villages (*desa wisata*) promoted as alternatives, the potential of local culture is often overlooked. These newer tourist villages tend to prioritize quick economic returns through mass tourism, leading to a uniformity in tourism products that often neglects local cultural heritage (except for established tourist villages such as Ubud, Penglipuran, and Tenganan) (Anom et al., 2020).

Referring to the foundational perspective of cultural anthropology, which asserts that culture is never static, it would be prudent for the Balinese people, particularly during this period of transition between traditional and modern influences, to recognize and embrace the power of cultural diffusion (exogenous) while also preserving the evolutionary forces inherent to their traditions (endogenous) (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). This balanced approach acknowledges the dynamic interplay between external influences and internal cultural resilience.

The external force of tourism, which originates from outside Bali, can be synergized with the island's inherent cultural strength. Compromise becomes a vital element in this interaction, particularly in tourism, where the collaborative roles of government, tourism practitioners, and local communities are essential. On a global scale, compromise holds even greater importance in the neoliberal era, which increasingly emphasizes interdependence (Anom et al., 2017; Anom et al., 2020; Murphy, 1983).

Through this research, it is attempted to understand cultural tourism as the core of Balinese tourism development that has been built since the Dutch colonial era was practiced. The existing condition shows that there are many concerns that Bali is currently ignoring cultural tourism. Instead, any new type of tourism has permits to be

opened and run in Bali, as long as it can generate profits for business actors, the government, and local communities.

Given these circumstances, it is an opportune moment to reconsider and advance the sustainability of cultural tourism in Bali. Traditional myths represent a significant form of cultural capital that can contribute to the future development of tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity with an essential motivation for tourists to learn, discover, experience, and enjoy tangible and intangible cultural products in tourist destinations. Tourist attractions or products in cultural tourism include art and architecture, history and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, and cultures that live with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs, and traditions as a material, intellectual, spiritual-cultural framework, and emotionally binding on the community ([United Nations World Tourism Organization \[UNWTO\], 2018](#)).

Since 1971, Balinese cultural heritage has become a tourism capital in three components: it has its roots in the Hindu religion, permeates the customs of the Balinese community, and inspires its traditional institutions, embodied in artistic forms of great beauty. Cultural capital in cultural tourism is aligned with natural capital and economic capital. The interest of tourists in understanding past culture as heritage has become a trend in the global era. The tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the past serves as cultural capital in tourism development ([Ardika, 2008](#)). The definition of cultural tourism by [UNWTO \(2018\)](#), if related to Bali, has existed since the birth of Balinese tourism during the Dutch colonial period. From the beginning, the Dutch developed and promoted Bali as a living monument and living culture to tourists.

The existence of myths is closely related to the dramatic distinction between the sacred and the profane, perhaps directing humanity to live in a sacred realm, filled with religious values reflecting divine purity in the universe and its contents. Understanding, experiencing, and appreciating purity determine the thoughts, attitudes, and ways of human life as *homo religiosus* ([Eliade, 1959](#)).

Myth is part of folklore and serves as a tradition that records people's lives over time as a collective memory, shaping, socializing, and reconstructing their culture. Myths provide answers for humans seeking clarity about their environment and historical origins ([Humaeni, 2012](#); [Malinowski, 2014](#)). Folklore or myths differ significantly from historical facts, often appearing fantastical yet containing truth or significance. It is not easy to find rational reasoning for an irrational background, and make sense of seemingly unreasonable phenomena ([Jamaluddin, 2013](#)).

Balinese folklore or traditional myth is the cultural capital of the local community and has been passed down through generations. Folklore is shared orally or through mnemonic devices in traditional societies ([Bronner, 2007](#)). Myths are reflected in cultural patterns, social structures, and the identity of communities ([Danandjaja, 1980](#)). Myths often originate from folklore directed at specific societies. Based on typology, myths can be categorized by cosmogony, origins, gods, divine beings, supernatural powers, prohibitions, natural phenomena, signs, dreams, rituals, life cycles, speech, phylogenesis, and psychoanalysis ([Ahimsa-Putra, 2009](#)).

Currently, Balinese society is transitioning from traditional to modern in alignment with tourism development. This creates unique circumstances, especially in the relationship

between Balinese people and tourism. The interplay of traditional myths as cultural capital in tourism development remains a phenomenon (Bourdieu, 2002; Carvalho et al., 2019; Eliade, 1960; Ourahmoune, 2016).

At present, Balinese folklore or myth is not considered central to tourism development, even though it remains a significant cultural capital for the local community. Folklore continues to be passed down through traditional societies in oral or symbolic forms. Myths, as part of folklore, serve as traditions that chronicle the lives of people over time, shaping their culture. Myths provide answers to humans about their environment and history. Folklore and myth evidence often differ from historical facts, appearing fantastical yet carrying truth or significance. It is challenging to rationalize an irrational background or make sense of the seemingly unreasonable (Anom et al., 2020).

In fact, myths in tourism research are not a new area of interest. The strong influence of critical semiotics thought on postmodern myths in tourism has been widely published, particularly concerning traditional myths that evolve into tourism commodities and the process of demythologizing for tourism purposes (Barthes, 1997; Davidson, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2003; Selwyn, 1996). Traditional myth and folklore experts, including folklorists and anthropologists, have expressed concern about the potential disappearance of local wisdom in the internet era. However, there is hope, albeit requiring significant effort, to create effective summaries and adaptations of this wisdom for modern contexts (Blank, 2009). The future of folklore and the academia concerned with it is uncertain without embracing technological advancements such as the internet (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Bendix, 2009; Dundes, 2005).

In many cases, folklore is not in the right hands to be transformed into tourism products, entertainment, education, or other creative outputs. Often, planners and programmers lack sufficient understanding of sociocultural approaches while being well-versed in technological applications. However, there is a growing number of folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, and communication experts focusing on the sociocultural dimensions of the internet and digital technology (Baym, 1993; Bronner, 2002; Hine, 2008; Howard, 1997).

In Indonesia, many studies focus on developing tourist destinations based on culture. However, specialized research on folklore tourism development, particularly focusing on local stories, myths, and legends, remains underexplored (Amanat, 2019). In the case of Bali, creativity, expertise, and individual talent are crucial in efforts to create innovative tourism products (Narya, 2010). Unfortunately, tourism development in Bali often prioritizes the exploitation of natural resources, such as coastal reclamation, land-use changes, and the construction of tourism facilities and infrastructure along coasts and rivers. These activities disturb the harmony of nature and the environment. Meanwhile, many cultural resources have not received adequate attention (Suarka & Cika, 2014).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs an interpretative paradigm with qualitative methods to understand traditional myths as a part of cultural tourism within a natural setting. In the field of tourism research, the interpretative paradigm combined with qualitative methods allows for in-depth data exploration under naturalistic conditions (Phillimore & Goodson 2004).

Frequently, qualitative research is associated with interpretivism as a general philosophy. In contrast to positivism, which aims to explain phenomena to predict and control them, interpretivism focuses on understanding and interpretation. Interpretivism

emphasizes relativism: reality is not objective, singular, or divisible but rather socially constructed, multiple, holistic, and contextual (Ozanne & Hudson, 1989). Unlike the hypothetic-deductive framework of positivism, interpretivism relies on a holistic-inductive approach. The research phenomenon is investigated as a whole, and theoretical propositions are derived from empirical fieldwork (Decrop, 2004). The qualitative method provides a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and political tourism aspects (Jennings, 2005; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Riley & Love, 2000).

The purposive sampling method determined informants based on certain considerations, following the objectives, not population representation (Koentjaraningrat, 1991; Rahmadi, 2011; Salim, 2006). A qualitative study is called internal sampling because it does not generalize but obtains a depth of meaning (Yin, 1987).

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Gender	Initial	Age	Job
Female	AA	50	Destination tourist Manager
Male	PS	52	Tour Guide
Male	MS	45	Tour Guide
Male	MK	58	Tourist Driver
Male	GS	30	Tour Operator/Tourist Car Rental

Source: Processed Data by Researchers (2024)

The interview protocol focuses on the informants' experiences and their points of view about cultural tourism including traditional myths or local myths. The five informants in Table 1 are considered capable of providing the information needed according to the scope of the research. This information will later be sorted to be further categorized according to research themes as qualitative data.

The study period was one month, focusing on Uluwatu, Batuan, and Trunyan between November 2023 and November 2024, using the researcher as a key instrument (Moleong, 2007). There were three data sources; focus observations (Sugiyono, 2008), in-depth interviews (Jennings, 2005), and literature studies (Zed, 2004). The qualitative data analysis revealed multiple realities and relationships between the researcher and the informants. Furthermore, a qualitative study is sensitive and adapts to various reciprocal influences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Muhadjir, 2000).

The data analysis began with field observations, interviews, and literature studies. The observations were through descriptions, while the interviews included the informant's information. The literature study included references, comparisons, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis cross-check. The second process referred to the results as qualitative data. The last stage before data presentation was interpretation, which avoids descriptive data. It combines practical experience, methodology mastery such as concepts, theories, field methods, sensitivity, good informant's relations, depth of data, and discovery of meaning, study focuses on mastery as state of the art, and researchers' ability to understand emics like a native point of view, and ethics such as researchers' interpretation of emic based on their expertise (Wulandari & Mahagangga, 2023).

Interpretivism does not propose a separation but rather an interactive and cooperative relationship between the investigator and the object of investigation. The focus is not on the quantity of information gathered but on its quality and richness. All aspects of observation are deemed valuable: the interpretive inquirer observes, listens, feels, asks, records, and examines. In-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis are preferred tools in this approach. Interpretivism is often associated with

naturalistic inquiry as it seeks to understand naturally occurring phenomena in their original states (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS

The Existence of Traditional Myths in Bali

What is unique is that the Balinese people generally do not accept the term "traditional myth." As is common in Indonesia, myths are often interpreted as superstition, magic, and far from the truth. The concept of traditional myth is largely rejected scientifically. The Balinese feel it is more appropriate to refer to their traditional myths as legends or history—events or phenomena believed to have actually occurred in the past. The term "traditional myth" seems less acceptable, and when discussing these stories, it is more common to use terms such as history, saga, or origin stories.

There is noticeable confusion in the community regarding the terminology of folklore, legends, myths, chronicles (*babad*), and history. Specifically, when addressing the origin of a sacred place or a historical figure, people's understanding often blurs the distinction between historical facts and oral traditions. *Babad*, as a historical account of a place, kingdom, or character, is generally accepted as authentic evidence of history. This conflation of terms demonstrates the challenges in distinguishing between verified historical narratives and oral traditions that carry cultural and symbolic significance.

In the current context of Balinese society, traditional myths continue to develop uniquely in daily life. Some people fully accept the traditional myths passed down through generations, believing them to be true. Others actively seek to investigate and expand these myths, connecting them to their beliefs, historical understanding, social ties, and even personal or communal prestige. Meanwhile, society remains indifferent to traditional myths, passively following a general consensus on which myths are accepted and which are disregarded. This diversity of perspectives highlights the evolving role of traditional myths within Balinese culture, balancing between preservation and adaptation (including in tourism products and attraction), as conveyed by the informant with the initials MK as follows:

"Bali has many historical stories, maybe including myths. But in Bali, it is strongly believed to have truth because it is related to holy places, or sacred things. This is also what makes tourists like it a lot. Maybe because it does not exist in their country, but this is precisely what makes tourism in Bali strong. Bali has the charm to attract tourists in many aspects." (MK, Male, 58 years old)

This statement highlights the cultural capital in Balinese tourism from a local perspective. Mr. MK realized that cultural tourism in Bali is a force in attracting tourists to come and visit. Cultural capital in tourism aligns with natural and economic capital (Richards, 1999). Tourists' growing interest in understanding past cultures as heritage has become a global trend (Ardika, 2008). Tangible and intangible cultural heritage from the past is considered a crucial cultural asset in tourism development (UNWTO, 2018).

Table 2. Observation Results of MK (Male, 58 years old)

Observation Aspect	Description
Location	Batuan, Gianyar, Bali
Date	November 27, 2023
Interviewer/Observer	Researcher
Tourist Driver Interaction	Tour guides narrated the cultural tourism in Bali.

Tourist Driver Reactions	It seems he is trying to convey his experiences as a tourist driver.
Tourist Driver Point	Cultural capital as culture tourism in Bali.

The structured observation results in Table 2 suggest that traditional myths play a significant role in cultural tourism in the case of Bali. The traditional myths in Bali are closely related to cosmogony, origins, gods, divine beings, supernatural powers, prohibitions/abstinence, natural phenomena, sounds/signs, dreams, rituals/ceremonies, life cycles, speech, phylogenesis, and psychoanalysis. At the same time as tourism development began to develop, traditional myths and other cultural capital became products and tourist attractions that were in demand by tourists.

The existence of myths is fundamentally tied to the dramatic distinction between the sacred and the profane. This distinction directs a type of person who lives in a sacred realm imbued with religious values, reflecting Divine purity manifested in the universe and its contents. Understanding, experiencing, and appreciating this purity significantly influence human thoughts, attitudes, and lifestyles as *homo religiosus*.

Commodification of Traditional Myths by Tourism Practitioners

However, for tourism or as tourism commodities, Bali tends to emphasize specific typologies. This focus aligns with the needs of the tourism business, which must balance authenticity with practical packaging for tourists. Research on Balinese myths for tourism suggests that guides generally convey myths related to local values/ideologies, the presence of sacred sites or temples, history or origins, characters, art, moral dichotomies, and norms or ethics (taboos).

In addition to philosophical, historical, folkloric, artistic, and social elements, guides aim to explain myths to tourists. They exhibit their unique abilities to communicate such information effectively. When providing explanations, guides rely on several basic factors: sources and mastery of the material, proficiency in foreign languages, tourist interests (since not all tourists are drawn to socio-cultural information), field expertise, and information delivery techniques (ensuring explanations are concise, clear, accurate, comprehensive, and culturally comparative based on situational needs), as conveyed by an informant with initial PS:

“In general, certified guides have a good ability to explain Balinese culture to tourists. Including senior guides with their experience will be able to make tourists understand tourist objects and attractions. However, not all tourists who come also want to know the details about Balinese culture. Such as stories, history, and traditional myths, many tourists are not interested. Here, a guide's flying hours are needed to read the situation.” (PS, 52 years old)

The statement from Mr. PS highlights that regarding traditional myths as tourism commodities (commodification and tourism), myths conveyed by guides to tourists are not deemed particularly essential. The general perception among guides is that tourists do not necessarily seek mythological details. Instead, tourists prefer relaxed, uncomplicated explanations aligned with their cultural background. A guide's ability to assess such situations is considered vital and is typically developed through years of professional experience rather than certification alone. This does not imply that guides lack the ability to explain myths. Field data suggests that Balinese cultural resources (including myths) are widely accessible and included in the certification courses for Balinese guides as part of their professional qualifications.

Table 3. Observation Results of PS (Male, 52 years old)

Observation Aspect	Description
Location	Batuan, Gianyar, Bali
Date	December 12, 2023
Interviewer/Observer	Researcher
Tourist Guide Interaction	He conveyed the guide's ability to convey information to tourists.
Tourist Driver Reactions	He seemed very confident with the information given because of his experience.
Tourist Driver Point	The knowledge of a guide is very necessary and existing conditions show that not all tourists like traditional myths.

The structured observation results in Table 3 suggest each guide has the power to convey and select information related to traditional myths to tourists. Depending on knowledge, interaction skills, situations, and most importantly, not all tourists are currently interested in traditional myths. In this case, the desire of the tourist market becomes important to be fulfilled. In fact, traditional myths are cultural capital and the main cause of tourist interest in coming to Bali since the early days of tourism development carried out by the Dutch colonial government in the early 1900s.

Myths associated with established attractions appear to be well-understood by guides, including local guides. However, for newer tourist attractions, such as emerging tourism villages, local myths often require deeper exploration to ensure uniformity and prevent confusion among tourists. Modernization has led many young people to undervalue myths, perceiving them as unimportant, overly varied, and non-essential. The priority often shifts to preserving traditions in line with contemporary development while retaining their substantive meaning. Nonetheless, in some tourist villages, there is growing recognition of the value of local myths as part of a fading tradition. Local tourism activists understand that tourism thrives on storytelling, especially local narratives unavailable in tourists' home regions. Consequently, they creatively package myths into local stories using unique commodification techniques, transforming original culture into consumable culture for tourism. Here is what a destination tourist manager said:

“We run a tourism business, so we must be able to sell products such as tour packages and the like to attract and be purchased by consumers, namely tourists. Market trends cannot be ignored. What tourists like, we try to prepare to increase sales and profits for the company. Packaging tourism products to attract tourists is very important.” (AA, 50 years old)

The statement from informant Mrs. AA means that tourism as a business must pay attention to the tourist market. The purpose of business is to seek profit and in this case, the manager of the tourist attraction must be able to sell the preferred tourism product. Conditioning traditional myths as cultural tourism may be called commodification in the tourism industry.

Table 4. Observation Results of AA (Female, 50 years old)

Observation Aspect	Description
Location	Kintamani, Bangli, Bali
Date	January 22, 2024
Interviewer/Observer	Researcher
Destination Tourist Manager Interaction	She narrated how traditional myths such as cultural tourism are carried out as tourism products.

Destination Tourist Manager Reactions	It seems that there is a dilemma between having to sell tourism products according to their actual setting or having to package them as tourism commodification.
Destination Tourist Manager Point	There is a business side that is difficult to avoid in order to achieve profits that may unknowingly sacrifice traditional cultural values in cultural tourism.

Based on Table 4, the myth of tourist consumption rebirths problems that often occur in interactions between hosts and guests concerning myths that deviate from the locality. Varied versions of information on myths in Bali, without a reliable source or basis, can confuse tourists. The lack of tourism related to local traditions, such as myths (connected to a local tourist attraction), diminishes their value as cultural capital for tourists in Bali. The information provided in tour packages or by guides about the myths of cultural activities, cultural attractions, and tourist sites is often biased and confuses tourists.

According to an informant with the initials GS, he stated:

“His party as a tour operator tries to provide satisfaction to consumers. His party is sure that the tour packages provided, tourist attractions, and tourist services including information from guides in the field are sufficient to satisfy tourists. The most important thing is that tourists feel comfortable, safe, and not disturbed. The problem of traditional myths in cultural tourism in Bali can currently be conditioned. The most important thing is not to violate the rules and Bali is indeed very famous for its culture.” (GS, 30 years old)

The statement from informant Mr. GS implies that traditional myths are not important. But how to package and make tourists interested and buy cultural tourism products is important. The business side remains the main thing by setting aside local cultural values and sustainability.

Table 5. Observation Results of GS (Female, 30 years old)

Observation Aspect	Description
Location	Denpasar, Bali
Date	June 25, 2024
Interviewer/Observer	Researcher
Tour Operator/Tourist Car Rental	He narrated that the important thing is that tourists' needs are satisfied.
Tour Operator/Tourist Car Rental Reactions	He does not consider the issue of traditional myths being forgotten important.
Tour Operator/Tourist Car Rental Point	Business aspects are very important to gain profit.

The structured observation results in Table 5 suggest culture including traditional myths is not the main thing but how to make tourists satisfied and their businesses profitable is the goal. In other words, Bali which is already famous for its culture including traditional myths will remain a prima donna because that is how it is. So, the problem of misinformation, wrong packaging, and excessive commodification is considered commonplace.

Even worse, incorrect information is sometimes believed to be the truth by tourists. Although there may be no immediate legal consequences, this misinformation can harm

Bali's tourism image if left unaddressed. While there are many differing views—both positive and negative—regarding this issue, tourism remains an economic resource widely believed to bring prosperity to the people of Bali. Many cases of misinformation have occurred at tourist destinations in Bali, yet solutions remain scarce.

The specific conjuncture of traditional myth as cultural capital for tourism development within the socio-cultural dimension of tourism perspective moves in two directions. On the one hand, traditional myth becomes local wisdom with many versions in Bali. Firstly, for example, in Trunyan Village, the local people still believe in their ancient myth. They have different names for gods and unique religious practices compared to the commonly practiced Hinduism in Bali, living harmoniously within modern life. Secondly, at Pura Luhur Uluwatu, Badung, traditional myths have become the belief of all Balinese Hindus. The holy area is considered a legacy of Ida Danghyang Dwijendra, a holy man from Java who came to Bali. The Hindu teachings he disseminated have strengthened the religious order and continue to exist today. Thirdly, Pura Puseh Desa Batuan in Gianyar possesses a traditional myth highly respected by the local people. As a legacy of the ancient Balinese kings before the arrival of the Majapahit to Bali, this temple symbolizes the power of these kings. Many archaeological remains in the Puseh Batuan village temple are thought to date back to the 10th–13th century AD.

On the other hand, traditional myth has become a tourism commodity, catering specifically to satisfy tourists. This direction has a specific impact on tourists, often without their realization. In terms of tourism commodities, Bali emphasizes certain typologies. This approach is tied to the tourism business's need to emphasize originality while also presenting practical packaging for tourists. For tourism purposes, guides generally convey myths related to local values and ideologies, the existence of holy places or temples, historical origins, characters, art, good and bad things, and norms or ethics (taboos).

In accordance with Balinese main local wisdom, traditional myths are closely related to *Tri Hita Karana*, which refers to the harmony of relationships between people and God and relates to three interconnected factors: *parhyangan* (religious activities), *pawongan* (social interaction), and *palemahan* (people and environment) (Roth & Sedana, 2015). In Bali, myths strengthen the social identity of groups, intertwining with religion and daily life (Ottino, 1994). In many cases, Balinese arts originate from traditional myths that are sacred, semi-sacred, or profane (Raka et al., 2020).

Most traditional myths still hold power as markers of the existence of spiritual, religious, and social order in Bali. The role of traditional myths is essential to preserve, as they are threatened by the forces of globalization and modernization, particularly among the younger generation.

In addition to philosophical, historical, folklore, art, and social aspects, guides attempt to explain myths to tourists. They demonstrate the ability to convey this information with their distinct characteristics. Essentially, guides base their explanations on several factors, including the source and depth of their knowledge, mastery of foreign languages, and the verbal and non-verbal interests of tourists. Some guides believe that not all tourists are interested in socio-cultural information, highlighting the importance of a guide's ability to master the field and employ effective techniques for packaging information—whether monotonous, concise, clear, accurate, comprehensive, or compared with the tourists' culture of origin or field situations. A guide who also works as a researcher with the initials MS stated:

“In fact, traditional myths in cultural tourism in Bali have very potential, but not all guides are willing and able to explain them to tourists well. On the other hand, the types of foreign tourists who come to Bali are dynamic. Starting from 90-100 years ago they liked cultural tourism, in the 1970s they liked culture and nature until now there are many types of tourists who like nightclubs, shopping and are digital nomads. However, many tourist attractions, tourist village managers, and guides pay close attention to traditional myths and pay attention to sustainable tourism. Currently in Bali, mass tourism is taking place, and alternative tourism is also being pursued as special interest tourism that pays attention to sustainability. The special interest tourist market is still high in Bali, it just escapes the attention of stakeholders. In addition, the current modernization and digitalization that has formed a practical-minded society has caused many traditional myths to be forgotten. In fact, I am sure that traditional myths in Balinese culture are the main cultural capital not only for tourism but also as a philosophy of life for the local community.” (MS, 45 years old)

The statement from informant Mr. MS shows that traditional myths in cultural tourism in Bali are very important. But it is hampered by many factors such as business factors and the behavior of unscrupulous guides. The point is that tourism in Bali is currently still very comfortable with mass tourism marked by the large number of tourists in quantity but not all tourism practitioners set aside traditional myths. Many still want quality tourism, sustainability, and traditional myths as capital for cultural tourism in Bali.

Table 6. Observation Results of MS (Male, 45 years old)

Observation Aspect	Description
Location	Denpasar, Bali
Date	June 27, 2024
Interviewer/Observer	Researcher
Tour Guide	He narrated Bali's tourism conditions in relation to traditional culture and myths.
Tour Guide Reactions	It seems that he has experience and in-depth knowledge of tourism in Bali.
Tour Guide Point	Traditional culture and myths and their dynamics.

The structured observation results in [Table 6](#) suggest traditional myths in cultural tourism in Bali are dynamic according to market interests. The role of guides is very large but the will of the tourist market is difficult to ignore. On the other hand, there are still many guides who try to sell traditional myths seriously, especially for interested tourists. On the other hand, the progress of the era also threatens traditional myths for local communities, especially the younger generation.

Particularly regarding myths as a tourism commodity (commodification and tourism), it appears that the myths explained by guides to tourists are not considered highly significant. Generally, guides believe that tourists do not absolutely require these myths. Tourists prefer explanations that are simple, relaxed, and easily relatable to their own cultural backgrounds. The ability of guides to recognize and adapt to this preference is crucial and is not necessarily determined by certification but rather by years of professional experience as a guide. This does not necessarily suggest that guides lack the ability to provide explanations, as the assumption is not entirely accurate; data shows that sources on Balinese culture, including myths, are widely available and easily

accessible in Bali. These resources are also included in the materials provided during the certification process required for becoming a professional guide in Bali.

In established tourist attractions in Bali, guides (including local guides) appear to have a strong grasp of the myths associated with these sites. However, in newer tourist destinations, such as emerging tourism villages, local myths often require further exploration to ensure consistency and avoid confusing tourists. Modernization seems to have led young people to view myths as unimportant due to their perceived lack of absoluteness, multiple versions, and complexity. Nonetheless, maintaining the tradition in alignment with contemporary development, while preserving the substance of its meaning, is considered essential.

In some tourist villages, efforts are being made to revive myths that are at risk of being forgotten. This is largely driven by local activists (tourism practitioners) who recognize that tourism thrives on storytelling—offering unique local narratives unavailable in tourists' home regions. These activists go beyond traditional publications to creatively package myths as local stories, employing innovative commodification techniques to transform original culture into a consumable tourism experience.

Like several Chinese guides, they are not native and not interested seriously in Balinese culture including the traditional myths. There have been many reports of certain unscrupulous Chinese guides lacking knowledge of Balinese culture and providing incorrect information to Chinese tourists. This is also due to the typology of Chinese tourists who come to Bali who really like the culture related to their culture (besides spa treatments and shopping tours). Therefore, the Chinese guides try to explain the Balinese cultural phenomenon, to build a connection with the tourists' culture of origin, namely their version of Chinese culture with Balinese culture (Information from informant MS, Male, 45 years old)

The role of myths in Bali's tourism industry is nuanced, as the main distributors of these myths are tourism practitioners, primarily guides affiliated with travel agents, freelance guides, and local guides. The challenge lies in the understanding and perception of these myths by the guides. While the content and interpretations of Balinese myths may be uniform, the decision to convey these myths, their substance, and their meanings ultimately rests in the hands of the guides. Generally, guides prioritize ensuring tourists' comfort and satisfaction during their vacation in Bali, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between guide and guest.

Ideally, myths in Bali should not be arbitrarily altered or diminished to suit the interests of tourism practitioners. Myths presented to tourists must align with how they are understood and practiced within Balinese society. Challenges such as varying versions, interpretations, and delivery methods are acknowledged. However, these issues should be addressed with honesty and commitment by guides. For instance, guides can clarify that multiple versions of a myth exist, provide diverse interpretations of rituals, or explain that different delivery methods for describing religious ceremonies may convey similar meanings or philosophies. This approach ensures the authenticity of the myths while accommodating the complexities inherent in their transmission.

However, myths, if interpreted or understood rationally, represent local wisdom that can be embraced by the younger or millennial Balinese generations. Myths in Bali contain cultural values that are often positive, but due to a lack of education, their oral traditions (although partially taught in schools) are often dismissed as mere bedtime tales by many younger generations. This attitude threatens the extinction of Balinese myths.

The socio-cultural impacts of tourism, including westernization, modernization, and globalization, pose external threats to the Balinese people. If the local community does not recognize this situation, many traditional ways of life could disappear. The strength of Balinese culture during the tourism era will continue to be tested.

Traditional myths are cultural capital that carry wise messages passed down through generations. Without myths, along with unique traditions and an exotic way of life, it would have been impossible for tourists from all over the world to be drawn to Bali in the first place. They come to see and learn how Balinese people conduct their daily lives, religious practices, social activities, and their harmonious relationship with nature. Balinese people believe that *Tri Hita Karana* can create world harmony, and they place deep trust in their gods through numerous religious ceremonies. Traditional myths in Bali carry both regular and particular meanings, and even in this modern age, some people still live as though their lives are part of ancient stories.

Without living monuments as part of a living culture (for example, socio-cultural religious activities in temples including traditional myths), tourists would likely lose interest in a small island like Bali. Culture, in its general and specific meanings, has made Bali famous worldwide. It would be absurd if during the progress of Balinese tourism, the importance of culture was forgotten. Traditional myths have directly and indirectly contributed to the development of tourism in Bali. The economic multiplier effect of tourism on the Balinese people originates from these myths.

The attachment of local cultural values is inseparable from the various myths embedded in the culture. If the understanding of traditional myths becomes fragile, cultural values will degrade, leading to cultural shifts and potentially negative impacts. Although external factors bring some positive changes, the risks associated with losing cultural identity remain significant.

DISCUSSION

Cultural Tourism Challenges

Since 1971, Balinese cultural heritage has served as a cornerstone of tourism, embodied in three essential components. Its deep roots in the Hindu religion, its pervasive influence on the customs of the Balinese community and traditional institutions, and its manifestation in artistic forms of great beauty (Picard, 1995).

In 1974, Bali introduced legal measures to guide tourism development through the enactment of a Regional Regulation (*Peraturan Daerah* or *Perda*) on cultural tourism, which underwent revisions in 1991 and 2012. However, since the 1980s and continuing to the present, its implementation has been inconsistent and largely unfulfilled. This regulation on cultural tourism often appears more as a slogan than as an actionable law with enforceable sanctions. A major contributing factor is the central government's focus on mass tourism to boost foreign exchange, which has opened the door widely to investment but weakened law enforcement by local governments.

Bali's tourism development began to fall under external control in the early 1980s, driven by large investors and central government efforts to increase state revenue. To preserve Balinese culture, it is recommended to strengthen the *banjar* as a local community social unit with autonomy within traditional territorial boundaries (*adat* areas). Strengthening the *banjar* would empower Balinese communities to have a stronger bargaining position

in tourism dynamics, ensuring economic benefits and the welfare of local residents (Kadt, 1979).

Since the 2000s, cultural tourism has faced increasing competition from other types of tourism. Mass tourism, now integrated as a dominant paradigm in Bali, has undeniably contributed to the island's prosperity. Large investors, not only from Jakarta but also from around the world, are presumed to have taken over significant portions of Bali's economic sector (tourism business).

In 2019, Bali's new leader, I Wayan Koster, a senior politician from the largest party in Bali (Partai Demokrasi Perjuangan Indonesia), implemented a different strategy compared to previous Balinese regional leaders. Koster manifestly focused on local culture in terms of local regulations and policies. Local culture, such as traditional villages (*desa adat*), traditional clothing, traditional languages, and the strengthening of the local community's economy through traditional villages, garnered Koster's attention. Koster gives traditional villages great power in managing their assets (land, gardens, rice fields, and others), to preserve social-religious-environmental aspects and build their socio-economic territories. The aspirations and agreements of the chief traditional villages (*Bendesa Adat* or *Kelihan Adat*) are the primary factors under their leadership, provided that they do not violate national laws. Each official government at the village level or *desa dinas* (the Balinese seven territorial units concept) continues to exercise authority on a territorial basis (the official government village or *desa dinas*) can consist of several customary villages or *desa adat* in its territory).

Village government offices, with the tasks and administrative areas of government under the state, are led by Perbekel or *Kepala Desa* (one village area in Bali has two village models: the official government village and the customary village or traditional village or *desa adat*). Koster wants Balinese culture to thrive even in modern life. Tourism development based on traditional culture is seen as important, especially since Balinese culture has been a cornerstone in tourism development for a long period.

There have been many socio-cultural changes, and many variations of tourist attractions, artistic creations, and new types of tourism have developed rapidly besides cultural tourism. Since 2014, mass tourism has increasingly received support from the central government in Jakarta. They set a big target for foreign tourist arrivals to Indonesia in 2019, with 20 million foreign tourists (before 2014, the average number of foreign tourist arrivals to Indonesia was no more than 8 million, and almost 70% of those tourists visited Bali as their main destination).

In this context, the concept of Balinese seven territorial units becomes particularly significant. First, the community is bound to the *Kahyangan Tiga* temples. Second, it is connected to the *banjar* (traditional village or community groups). Third, the *subak* (traditional irrigation system) serves as a key unifying element. Fourth, the social stratification system, *Tri Wangsa*, links individuals to a traditional hierarchy. Fifth, kinship systems, such as *dadia* and *kawitan*, strengthen familial bonds. Sixth, various groups (*sekaa*), often related to religious, social, or artistic functions, emerge as subunits of the *banjar*. Finally, the community aligns with the official government structure of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Geertz, 1959).

The degradation or loss of any of these territorial units signals a shift in Balinese socio-cultural life. If the Balinese can maintain their connection to all seven units, traditional culture will remain robust, providing a foundation for socio-cultural activities. However, change is inevitable, as demonstrated by significant shifts in three specific territorial

units: the *subak* (due to the repurposing of agricultural land), *sekaa subak* as traditional peasant groups (except for artistic *sekaa* directly tied to tourism), and the *Tri Wangsa* system (due to the decline of feudalism).

The inevitability of change must be acknowledged. Both physical and non-physical transformations are evident in Bali, and the preservation of its valuable cultural heritage has become a matter of concern. Westernization, modernization, and globalization represent external factors that have significantly influenced Bali. While these forces contribute positively in many ways, they also pose risks to local cultural values. If the understanding and appreciation of traditional myths, which are integral to these values, weaken, it is likely that cultural degradation, shifts, and potentially negative impacts will follow. The delicate balance between external opportunities and internal cultural preservation is crucial for Bali's sustainable cultural future.

The Future of Traditional Myth

The general view of anthropologists is that myths are essential for humans to find clarity about the nature of their environment and their past history. As sacred stories, myths are always present in every culture, regardless of location. Various studies, particularly those conducted by Western researchers, reveal that myths consistently emerge in the socio-religious activities of societies, especially traditional ones. Most societies are surrounded by myths that hold sacred values for their adherents. Both traditional (preliterate) and modern societies utilize sacred myths as symbols of confirmation and authority. In conducting various religious, social, economic, and political activities, myths are often invoked to instill belief in their sacred nature, making them untouchable and worthy of preservation. Many experts argue that humans, both individually and collectively, cannot live without myths or mythology. This underscores the vital importance of myths for human existence, particularly in matters of faith and religion.

Myths in Bali have long fascinated foreign anthropologists and artists who are captivated by their tangible manifestations in various aspects of Balinese life. These myths are perceived as origins, restrictions, moral messages, and other elements that contribute to Bali's cultural uniqueness. In-depth, Balinese myths are portrayed through various perspectives, both functional and structural, to foster harmony and social solidarity among the people. Myths in Bali take the form of miracles, legendary figures, healing practices, arts, rituals, and more. Their purpose is to explain the world, provide insights, and create stable relationships between humans, nature, and God.

From a critical view, myths in Bali serve similar explanatory purposes but are understood to carry more complex and layered functions tied to the interests of their creators or users. This approach does not aim to categorize myths as strictly positive or negative. Instead, it seeks to deconstruct seemingly stable phenomena through critical examination. When analyzing a myth, this perspective explores not only its background, content, and apparent purpose but also its critical dimensions—why the myth was created, the power dynamics at play during its creation, and the interests of the actors involved. This includes examining whether the myth is adhered to or disregarded by the community that supports the associated culture.

It is time for the local government to consider planning, strategic initiatives, and programs to elevate myths as cultural capital, moving beyond mere discourse. The development of cultural tourism in Bali must be maintained and realized as an outcome of sustainable tourism. However, it must be acknowledged that such thoughts and policies have not yet been considered urgent. This is largely due to the prevailing confidence in the enduring appeal of Bali's cultural tourism, which is consistently in demand and favored by tourists.

The primary indicator often used to measure success is the growth in tourist arrivals, which continues to show an increasing trend year after year. Consequently, issues such as leveraging myths as cultural capital for tourism development strategies, including as a means to instill a love for local culture in the younger generation, have not been deemed significant.

The initial step that should be undertaken is to trace the existence of myths in Bali and ensure they are communicated to tourists. Coordination between agencies such as the Culture Office and the Tourism Office is essential. Collaboration among the government, academics, tourism practitioners, and the local community is equally crucial to achieving this goal. For instance, myths related to acceptable and unacceptable behaviors at temples in Bali could be digitally packaged into short videos. These videos could then be displayed on all airlines heading to Bali and aired briefly before the plane lands on the island. If implemented, such measures could significantly minimize instances of disrespect toward temples in Bali, such as sitting on holy sites and other inappropriate behaviors.

In building a tourist attraction, one must pay attention to the socio-economic conditions of the local community, the socio-cultural of the local area, religious values, customs, the environment, and the tourist attraction itself. The development of tourist objects and attractions can be carried out by the Government, business entities, or individuals by involving and cooperating with other parties (Heston & Kotib, 2022), including making it effective through regional promotional bodies and endorsing them on official social media channels managed by regional governance. These initiatives highlight the need for formalized policies and increased support to enhance the marketing and distribution of local products (Prihatini et al., 2024)

Although relatively few tourists express explicit interest in traditional myths, the assumption remains that cultural tourism is inherently associated with Bali in the minds of visitors. At a minimum, tourists often associate Bali with iconic sites such as Uluwatu Temple, Tanah Lot Temple, Balinese art, and various ritual traditions, which are psychologically difficult to ignore. Therefore, the trajectory of cultural tourism in Bali must be revisited, realigned, and not neglected solely due to the economic interests of tourism. The existing cultural capital should be leveraged in conjunction with the strengths of social and symbolic capital to benefit economic capital.

The current issue is that economic capital often dominates other forms of capital, leading to the commodification of culture (including myths) and even the distortion of cultural meanings. This is evidenced by the fact that myths in Bali continue to be marginalized. Yet, myths in Bali represent a powerful form of cultural capital. The root cause is the short-term economic priorities of many tourism components. The prevailing question is: What is the fastest way to generate revenue? Consequently, dimensions of local culture, such as myths, are often relegated to a secondary role, treated merely as a complement, and in some cases, misrepresented.

Despite this, not all guides, travel agents, and tourism practitioners disregard myths as cultural capital. There are still individuals in the tourism sector who cherish Balinese culture and are committed to ensuring the sustainability of Balinese cultural tourism.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the development of tourism in Bali has forgotten traditional myths as cultural capital. In fact, almost every village in Bali has traditional myths that

can be packaged as unique tourist attractions or distinctive tourism products. Tourist practitioners such as tour guides tend to ignore traditional myths or local myths in conveying tourism products and cultural attractions in Bali. This is due to market trends and practical aspects of carrying out their duties. There are still tour guides who think that explaining traditional myths to tourists is very complicated. In fact, this complexity is the basis of tourists' curiosity and admiration for Balinese culture.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Bali's tourism sector was significantly affected. This situation should be a reminder to prioritize cultural capital, such as traditional myths. Hundreds of traditional myths spread across Bali have not all been explored for tourism development. It is time to focus on the resilience and sustainability of tourism in Bali. The history of Balinese tourism should not be forgotten, because it is rooted in the uniqueness of its culture, the friendliness of its people, and its stunning natural environment. If this situation is understood, Bali with its limited carrying capacity will not damage its nature and environment by the construction of villas, resorts, hotels, beach clubs, and the like. By developing traditional myths as part of cultural tourism, tourism development not only has an economic impact but also preserves past traditions for the younger generation. The tourism that is aimed at is quality tourism, not mass tourism as sustainable tourism development and for future tourism generations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

1st Author

IGAO Mahagangga is a Doctoral student of Tourism at Udayana University, Denpasar, Bali. He teaches at the Faculty of Tourism, University of Udayana. His research interest includes the anthropology of tourism, cultural tourism, and the socio-cultural impact of tourism. Email: okamahagangga@unud.ac.id.

2nd Author

Agung Suryawan Wiranatha is Associate Professor at Udayana University in Bali Indonesia. He is currently the Head of Centre of Excellence in Tourism, Udayana University. He has undertaken extensive tourism research in Indonesia, particularly Bali, and has given presentations for many tourism workshops and conferences, as well as published some books and journal articles. His field of interests are environmental management, sustainable development, tourism planning & policy, green tourism certification, and system approach in agroindustrial management, tourism, and environmental management.

3rd Author

I Nyoman Sunarta is Professor pariwisata at University of Udayana. He is currently the Head of Tourism Doctoral Program, Udayana University. His research interests includes water, environment, sustainable tourism development, tourism planning, and tourism spatial impact. From 2018-2022 he was Dean Faculty of Tourism, University of Udayana.

4th Author

I Putu Anom is Professor in Religion and Tourism, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Tourism, and the first Dean Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University. His research interest includes tourism economics, cultural tourism, and tourism planning. He is the author of "Handbook Tourism as Science: Character and Prospect in the Indonesia language".