

## Historical and cultural negotiations in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah: Beyond the utopia of ‘unity in diversity’

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*There have been some changes to Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, a popular ethnographic theme park built nearly five decades ago during President Suharto’s New Order era to present a utopian version of ‘Unity in Diversity’ (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika), Indonesia’s state motto. This article discusses the changes and continuities manifested in the present-day slightly expanded Taman Mini. Unlike earlier scholarship focusing on sociopolitical and symbolic aspects of the theme park, this article argues that Taman Mini’s mainly domestic visitors understand and interact with its walk-in models of traditional architecture and ‘highlights’ of Indonesian culture and history in ways that often differ from the official script which presents cultural diversity through sanitised ethnographic displays. Moving beyond its official, touristic and commercial intentions and design, Taman Mini has become a lively place for everyday cultural production, engagement and negotiation for its many Indonesian visitors.*

While researching traditional architecture in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, the ‘Beautiful Indonesia in the Miniature Park’ in Jakarta, I saw a group of young girls practising the Balinese *pendet* dance inside the Bali pavilion. The teacher was a middle-aged man from Bali and worked for the Balinese government in Jakarta. Enthusiastic young girls aged between six and twelve were dancing in front of their proud audience, who were mostly the girls’ parents. I too joined this small audience, enjoying the beautiful Balinese architecture as well as the live performance in Taman Mini. Besides traditional dance classes, I found out that wedding ceremonies and community gatherings were held almost every weekend in the provincial pavilions. Such events and activities were rarely seen in Taman Mini during my childhood in the 1980s and the 1990s when I visited the complex several times.

When inaugurated in 1975, Taman Mini had 26 pavilions, each representing a province. The East Timor pavilion was added in 1980 since this was a new province. After Reformasi in 1998, in the context of decentralisation and regional autonomy, eight new provinces were carved out of the existing provinces, while East Timor voted for autonomy and became independent (in 2002 the East Timor pavilion

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became the Museum of East Timor). There are now 34 pavilions, one for each province. Since the ring of land surrounding the artificial lake with the other pavilions was already full, the management built the new pavilions in the northern part of the park. The new provinces constructed pavilions that best represented their culture and identity, for example, the pavilion representing the new province of West Papua created in February 2003 had modern houses decorated with some traditional symbols. Other changes have taken place in recent years. The North Sumatra pavilion, for instance, used to only have Toba and Karo houses in its cluster, but later, two other model traditional houses, representing Mandailing and Nias, were built next to them. The Indonesian Chinese Cultural Park (Taman Tionghoa) inaugurated in 2006 was another significant change in Taman Mini. Taman Tionghoa is meant to demonstrate to the public that Tionghoa culture is part of Indonesian history and culture, after the public expression of Chinese culture had been suppressed for several decades. Changes in Taman Mini may affect how people understand the representation of Indonesian culture, which was previously understood predominantly in terms of Javanese culture and cosmology.<sup>1</sup>

This article reassesses Taman Mini, its role in the construction of identities of the Indonesian nation, and how they are contested and negotiated. As a New Order project to promote national unity, Taman Mini collected and appropriated models and samples of Indonesian culture, arranging them into a cultural village cum leisure park to create an official version of national culture. After the Second World War, young nation-states in Southeast Asia sought to create national narratives to foster social cohesion by various cultural and architectural means, including museums and theme parks.<sup>2</sup> Taman Mini was similarly built both to cater to tourism and to represent the idea of the nation. Partly as a result of sociopolitical changes, especially since the *Reformasi* period following the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, the didactic function of Taman Mini in the construction of a national cultural identity has changed, however. This article discusses the changes and continuities reflected in the present-day Taman Mini, and I contend that twenty-first century Indonesian visitors understand the cultural exhibits and collections in ways that depart from the official script. As my encounter with the Balinese in the Bali Pavilion suggests, Taman Mini has become a lively place for cultural production and negotiation.

Earlier studies on Taman Mini mostly focused on the park as an expression of the cultural politics of Suharto's New Order regime (1966–98). By looking at changes in recent decades, this article offers a new view of how the construction of identities in Taman Mini—commonly discussed as 'idealising normality'—is negotiated. In his 1994 work, *On the subject of 'Java'*, John Pemberton attacks Taman Mini as a strategy of cultural containment in which all forms of difference are rearticulated as expressions of a homogeneous diversity.<sup>3</sup> He argues that the New Order government was an enthusiastic promoter of regional cultures, in part to divert the appeals of its critics.

1 Shelly Errington, *The death of authentic primitive art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 188–227.

2 Vincent Houben, 'Representations of modernity in colonial Indonesia', in *Figurations of modernity: Global and local representations in comparative perspective*, ed. Vincent Houben and Mona Schrempf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 23–38.

3 John Pemberton, *On the subject of 'Java'* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 152–61.

Pemberton discusses Taman Mini as one of the New Order's central projects to direct the people's attention away from the everyday. Most scholars have similarly discussed Taman Mini as an 'imagined scape', one which reflected the continuing influence of the colonial Dutch cultural legacy.<sup>4</sup> Given the social, cultural and political changes since the Park was set up, it is rather interesting to juxtapose the former discussions of the park that relate to its official meaning with present-day visitors' multiple interpretations and experiences. Unlike Pemberton who has a totalising gaze about the New Order and Javanese elitist discourse, my intention in discussing the cultural dynamics of Taman Mini is to underscore contextual complexity and give voice to human agency. I believe that visitors of Taman Mini have long been exploiting the park's physical exhibits and landscaping features for various private, familial or community purposes, even against the intention of authorities, and these activities show some degree of historical and cultural negotiation. I argue that while Taman Mini's idealised displays have a profound effect on visitors, the visitors interact with the cultural spaces they encounter, and the displays themselves are adapted to the touristic demands of visitors. In this way, the historical and cultural narrative begins to be reshaped.

Anthropologist Edward Bruner asserts that tourists' perceptions are more important in developing touristic representations of culture than a show of authenticity.<sup>5</sup> Bruner examines tourist productions that take account of the multiple perspectives of the various actors such as tourists, producers, and locals. A tourist site is a complicated space of encounter and includes the theatrical creation of a cultural imaginary, performed in 'actual places' where tourists meet locals. Authenticity can have different meanings depending on who is asked and whose narration is presented at a tourist site. By focusing on touristic description and sensibility instead of the ethnographic narrative, Bruner mentions the importance of giving visitors what they expect to find, even if the political undertones are unavoidable. In this sense, cultural displays such as those in Taman Mini are adjusted to the demands of tourism, although the tourists can understand the displays in their own ways. In the same vein, James Siegel explains how power within communication is more important than the specific messages conveyed. He draws an example of some foreign elements among the traditional displays in Taman Mini—such as in the Aceh pavilion which has an old aeroplane which was donated by the Acehnese people to the Indonesian government during the Indonesian Revolution. By using Taman Mini as an example of a controlled and formal narrative of understanding the peaks of Indonesian culture on the one hand and the breaking of that control on the other through foreign elements, he emphasises that 'it would be a mistake to think that these effects are necessarily domesticating and

4 Tim Lindsey, 'Concrete ideology: Taste, tradition, and the Javanese past in New Order Indonesia', in *Culture and society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 166–82. See Abidin Kusno, *Behind the postcolonial: Architecture, urban space, and political cultures in Indonesia* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 2000). See Michel Picard, 'Cultural tourism in Bali: National integration and regional differentiation', in *Tourism in South-East Asia*, ed. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael J.G. Parnwell (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 71–98. See also Michael Hitchcock, 'Tourism, Taman Mini and national identity', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 26, 74 (1998): 124–35.

5 Edward M. Bruner, *Culture on tour: Ethnographies of travel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

completely controllable by authority'.<sup>6</sup> I find both Bruner's and Siegel's interpretations of Taman Mini focusing on consumers (tourists) or local people superimposing their own meanings and social practices onto an official state-sponsored site compelling. Even though Taman Mini's layout and features are still largely the sanitised New Order versions, the idea and understanding of Taman Mini needs to be complicated by looking at how it also evokes diverse attitudes towards national culture. Ordinary Indonesians, who form the bulk of visitors to and consumers of Taman Mini's displays, are an important source of such multiple interpretations.

The first part of this article discusses the origins and development of Taman Mini. Taman Mini's lineage can partly be traced to colonial open-air parks, ethnographic museums and representations of the Dutch East Indies in international exhibitions, and partly to modern theme parks like Disneyland. The layout and the arrangement of exhibits in Taman Mini has similarities with Dutch colonial displays of 'highlights' of Indonesian culture.<sup>7</sup> However, Taman Mini emphasises the independence of the Republic of Indonesia by modifying the earlier exoticised images of Indies culture.

Presenting both the ancient and modern cultures of Indonesia, the New Order government created a utopian image of unity in diversity as an instrument for imagining Indonesia's historical roots and identity, while also showing aspects of material progress and spirituality. People can observe this utopian image in the displays of traditional houses and the promotion of the Javanese Indic state as the chosen elite culture to restore the glory of the past. Therefore, the second part of this article deals with the spatial arrangements and exhibits in Taman Mini and the changes that have occurred in the past two decades.

Since most visitors to Taman Mini are domestic, the cultural displays in Taman Mini are intended for Indonesian consumption. The last part of this article discusses how the traditional exhibits in Taman Mini not only display the official construction of Indonesian regional cultures, but also leave room for visitors to create their own meanings, which occasionally challenges the official interpretations of the exhibits. Taman Mini is an example of how culture and history may be negotiated even in an official and touristic theme park.

### **A sanitised version of Indonesian culture**

Indonesia's second president Suharto, whose administration lasted for 32 years and whose regime was known as the New Order (Orde Baru), built Taman Mini. To maintain stability and control over a diverse Indonesia, Suharto established a system of patrimonial ties and a military-dominated government.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the New

6 James T. Siegel, *Fetish, recognition, revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3–4.

7 The Dutch presented the culture of the Indies in some international exhibitions, including in 1883 (Amsterdam), in 1910 (Brussels), and in 1931 (Paris), as well as in local exhibitions such as the Pasar Gambir in Batavia and the 1914 Colonial Exhibition in Semarang, Central Java. See Yulia Nurliani Lukito, 'Colonial exhibition and a laboratory of modernity: Hybrid architecture at Batavia's Pasar Gambir', *Indonesia* 100 (2015): 77–103.

8 Reimar Schefold, 'The domestication of culture: Nation-building and ethnic diversity in Indonesia', in 'Globalization, localization and Indonesia', special issue, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 154, 2 (1998): 259–80. See also Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the*

Order's propaganda machine used ethnicity in a 'highly articulate rhetoric of culture', where traditional values and customary behaviour were continuously depicted.<sup>9</sup> During his rule, national projects such as museums and parks were built on a monumental scale as symbols of state power. However, unlike the first president, Sukarno, who used modern architecture to convey his vision of Indonesia, Suharto used traditional architecture, mostly Javanese, to reclaim the nation's past glory.<sup>10</sup> The Indonesian past was especially related to the pre-colonial eras of the Sriwijaya and the Majapahit kingdoms.<sup>11</sup>

On 13 March 1971, the first lady Siti Hartinah, usually known as Ibu Tien, stated her determination to build a national recreation centre that presented the greatness and the beauty of Indonesia in miniature, inspired by her visits to Disneyland in the United States and Timland (Thailand in Miniature) in Thailand.<sup>12</sup> She intended to strengthen Indonesian people's love for and pride in their nation, although Taman Mini's primary objective was to promote tourism. Taman Mini was then developed by the Suharto family's Our Hope Foundation (Yayasan Harapan Kita), chaired by Ibu Tien.

This park became one of the New Order's major projects to encourage tourism and enhance national consciousness through promoting regional cultures. As stated in a book published to celebrate the twenty-second anniversary of Taman Mini in 1997, Suharto described its objective:

As a nation with a very diverse society, we must indeed promote a national culture that harmoniously combines the diversity of regional arts without abandoning their respective identities. We are also subscribing faithfully to our culture as symbolized by the country's coat of arms: '*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*' [Unity in Diversity].<sup>13</sup>

The estimated budget to build Taman Mini in May 1978 was around US\$26 million. This huge allocation of funds for the project and to compensate around 300 families who had to surrender their land and resettle caused some protests.<sup>14</sup> The budget was equivalent to building seven universities, each the size of the notable Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, or 52 small factories each with 100 workers.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of these objections, the government persisted with the project and inaugurated Taman Mini Indonesia Indah on 20 April 1975.

*origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 26. On Taman Mini, see John Pemberton, 'Recollections from "Beautiful Indonesia" (Somewhere beyond the postmodern)', *Public Culture* 6 (1994): 241–62; and Shelly Errington, 'The cosmic theme park of the Javanese', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 31, 1 (1997): 188–227.

9 Michael Hitchcock, 'Tourism, Taman Mini and national identity', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 26, 74 (1998): 124–35.

10 Rudolf Mrázek, 'Bypasses and flyovers: Approaching the metropolitan history of Indonesia', *Social History* 29, 4 (2004): 425–43.

11 Clifford Geertz, *The social history of an Indonesian town* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965). See also Timothy P. Daniels, 'Imagining selves and inventing Festival Sriwijaya', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30, 1 (1999): 38–53.

12 Hitchcock, 'Tourism, Taman Mini and national identity'.

13 Taman Mini Publication Committee, *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah: 20 April 1975–20 April 1997* (Jakarta: Jayakarta Agung Offset, 1997), author's translation.

14 Hitchcock, 'Tourism, Taman Mini and national identity', p. 127.

15 Pemberton, 'Recollections from "Beautiful Indonesia"'.

Since then, the park has become one of the main destinations for local tourists. During the 1990s, there was a rise in tourism in Indonesia, and tourism became the fourth major contributor to the Indonesian economy. By 2009, more than 4 million local tourists visited Taman Mini per year to take pleasure in the display of diverse Indonesian cultures.<sup>16</sup> In 2015, this number had skyrocketed to 5.5 million visitors annually, but the configuration of visitors has remained almost the same as that of 30 years ago, with 97 per cent of visitors being local, mainly from Jakarta and West Java.

Taman Mini is located in Pondok Gede, East Jakarta, very close to the Jagorawi toll road that connects Jakarta to Bogor City in West Java, and near the Halim Perdana Kusuma Airport for domestic flights. The governor of Jakarta, Ali Sadikin, was the first project director and originally proposed an area of 150 ha for the park. Later, the government added the surrounding area for Taman Mini's future development, and the park's total area became 414.3 ha.<sup>17</sup>

Taman Mini has three layers or expanding circles (fig. 1). The first circle consists of 8.4 ha at the centre of the park in the form of an artificial lake, with islands whose features represent a map of Indonesia on a scale of 1:10,000. The miniature Indonesian archipelago spans west to east and even has mountains and plateaus following the existing landscape. The second circle surrounding the lake consists of pavilions based on each Indonesian province, with a circular street between the first and second circles. The third and outermost circle of Taman Mini consists of various theme parks, museums, and religious buildings.

Taman Mini has three gates, with the main gate located to the west facing the highway. The main gate consists of three big arches decorated with *kala-makara*, the figures often found at the entrance of temples in Central Java (fig. 2). *Kala*, or sun power, has the form of a giant open mouth without the lower jaw, and *makara*, or earth power, looks like a dragon's head. The three arches of *kala* represent the past, present and future of Indonesia. As visitors walk through the park, they may understand the history museums, cultural exhibits and performances as the past and the present of the nation, and the science and technology museums as dreams of the future.

Many features of Taman Mini convey symbolic meanings for Indonesians. Close to the main entrance is a square with two big murals showing the 'Relief of the Indonesian Struggle', with the Pancasila Flame Monument located at the centre of the square. The Pancasila Flame Monument has a 17-metre circumference, 8 metre-long pillars at its base, and a height of 45 metres, measurements signifying the date of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945. The whole park displays the state philosophy of *Pancasila*, the five principles put forward to guide political and social rule, and the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, 'Unity in Diversity'.

16 Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi DKI Jakarta, 'Number of tourists who visit featured tourism objects by location, 2011–2015', 30 Jan. 2017, <https://jakarta.bps.go.id/statictable/2017/01/30/158/jumlah-kunjungan-wisatawan-ke-obyek-wisata-unggulan-menurut-lokasi-2011-2015.html> (accessed 10 July 2019); see also Picard, 'Cultural tourism', pp. 71–98.

17 According to Governor DKI Jakarta, Decree no. 3498/1984, the original site of Taman Mini has been decreased by 19,865 ha for the Purna Bakti Pertiwi Museum and by 2.5 ha for the Pinang Ranti bus terminal.



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|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Main Entrance             | 6. Lake or Indonesian archipelago | 11. West Sumatra Pavilion |
| 2. Javanese Sasono Buildings | 7. Kala Makara Gate               | 12. Science Museum        |
| 3. Museum Indonesia          | 8. Traditional houses             | 13. Transportation Museum |
| 4. Snowbay Waterpark         | 9. Balinese Pavilion              | 14. Outer Ringroad        |
| 5. Religious Buildings       | 10. Central Java Pavilion         | 15. Cable car             |

**Figure 1. Map of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah.**

Source: Gunkarta Gunawan Kartapranata.



**Figure 2. The three arches of *kala-makara* at Taman Mini with the Pancasila Flame Monument in the background.**

Source: Author's collection.

There are 18 museums in Taman Mini, with each museum embodying a symbol of nationality. For instance, the Komodo Indonesian Fauna Museum and Reptile Park is in the shape of the komodo dragon, which is only found in eastern Indonesia. The modern architecture of the Science and Technology, Transportation and other scientific museums signify Indonesia's progress. There are 11 theme parks spread mostly around the outermost circle, such as the Freshwater Aquarium Park, the Aviary Park, and the Jasmine Park. In addition, the Snowbay Water Park was opened in 2009, and Skyworld in 2015.

Our Hope Foundation appointed Nusa Consultants to develop the master plan and the general infrastructure of Taman Mini, including the lake, the Pancasila Flame Monument, the Joglo-Sasono function halls, and the management building. The

Sasono Langen Budoyo complex comprises the Pendopo Sasono Utomo as the main hall, and two smaller halls constructed in the style of a *joglo*, a traditional Javanese house. The public can rent these buildings for exhibitions and weddings. The building bears a Javanese name rather than an Indonesian name, and this signifies how the founders of Taman Mini consistently focused on Javanese culture as a reference for national culture. The architecture of the Sasono Utomo is a copy of the pendopo in a Central Javanese aristocratic house, but on a larger scale. A librarian from the Central Javanese city of Surakarta once said that the grand hall at Taman Mini was grand, but not truly great (*ageng ning ora agung*).<sup>18</sup> The librarian further commented that the grand audience hall could not compare to the *real* Kraton Surakarta, which is Central Java's oldest surviving palace with a genealogy of Javanese kings, implying that the Taman Mini version could not manifest a 'centre of the cosmos'.<sup>19</sup>

Taman Mini presents full-scale customary houses, *rumah adat*, or replicas of palaces from each province. The architecture of each province is represented by only two or three pavilions, regardless of how many ethnic groups it has. The main entrance for each pavilion complex faces the street around the central lake, with its map of the archipelago. Each provincial pavilion also contains exhibits of ornaments, tools, clothing and other items from its constituent ethnic groups.

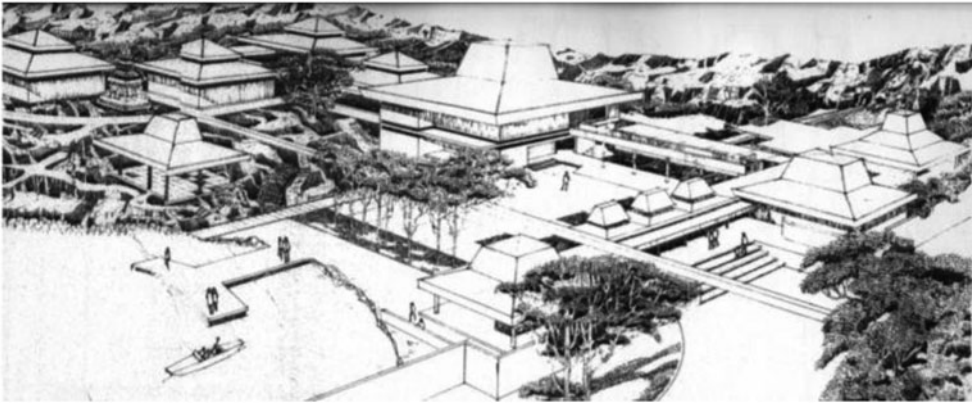
There are eight traditional buildings in the Central Java Pavilion, including the *pendopo agung* as the main building, some smaller Javanese traditional buildings, and an open stage (fig. 3). The *pendopo agung* is a full-sized replica of Pendopo Gede Mangkunegaran in Surakarta (fig. 4). However, the replica in Taman Mini has a concrete base and looks bright, whereas the original one has a non-concrete base and looks quite spiritual. This *pendopo agung* has an open veranda that has a *joglo* roof and *sakaguru* main pillars and maintains its original function as a space to hold important meetings and traditional ceremonies. Behind the *pendopo* stands a balcony called the *pringgitan*, an open structure usually for *wayang kulit* performances. The balcony connects the *pendopo* to a building that houses an exhibition of Central Javanese clothing and art. Next to the main building stands the *tajuk mangkurat*, which functions as a management office for the Central Java pavilion, but originally, this kind of building was a house for a noble family that epitomised the harmony of family life. The Central Java complex also contains miniatures of three world-famous temples in Java: Borobudur, Prambanan, and Mendut. The Central Java province has more pavilions than other provinces, once again indicating the privileging of Javanese culture under Suharto.

The park presents the visitor with excerpts of Indonesian history, cultural riches, and modernisation all in one visit. The centre has symbolic power in the form of a complete map of Indonesia, and the middle and peripheries present the culture and images of the nation's progress, in a very selective way. When visitors walk from the inner to the outer circles or vice versa, they absorb the harmony between the traditional and modern cultures of Indonesia. Understanding the site from the centre to the periphery also offers a clear message of a strong centralised power, and how loyalty to traditional values can bring harmony to the nation.

18 Cited in Pemberton, 'Recollections from "Beautiful Indonesia"', pp. 249–50.

19 Ibid., p. 249.





**Figure 3. Bird's eye-view of the Central Java Pavilion.**

*Source:* Technical Department of Taman Mini.



**Figure 4. Pendopo Gede Mangkunegaran in Taman Mini.**

*Source:* Author's collection.

Visitors may also participate in directed historical walks evoking tangible connections between the past and present. In this way, historical and cultural knowledge is acquired not through textual engagement but a sensory encounter with the material culture that is presented. This practice generates a particular kind of historical and cultural engagement, one immediately linked to space, feeling, and action. In other words, history and culture are not just understood through viewing the exhibitions, but they are also experienced through the sensorium. The events of the past are reconstructed to position visitors as inheritors of a glorious history which shapes the possibilities of an imaginable future. What makes such a view of history convincing is not its evidentiary authority but its emotional impact.

However, it is almost impossible to experience all the collections in the huge park in one day since there are so many presentations of Indonesian history and culture. In this sense, visitors may find it hard to absorb all the information given or choose what impresses them most. On the other hand, visitors can easily walk into and embrace whichever aspect of Indonesian culture they encounter without difficulty.

The park locates disparate ethnic groups next to each other, and the circling of the lake in itself implies an unreal pre-colonial harmony between all communities and regions. The officially sanctioned design seems to sanitise historical rivalries and inequalities in an effort to promote national unity. This is reinforced by the many pre-colonial images aimed at recreating shared nostalgic representations of the nation.

From 1973, the New Order government sponsored various cultural engineering projects in literature, film, and theatre through its ministries. Literature and film were usually censored to avoid content deemed subversive and immoral. The Department of Education and Culture (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Depdikbud) subsidised and helped to organise cultural performances at Taman Mini to be aired on Indonesian television. Depdikbud invited communities to participate in such events, but officials would provide performance guidelines, such as modernising instrumentation, simplifying the repertoire and changing the choreography. It seems that Depdikbud saw no conflict between promoting such changes and its responsibility to 'safeguard' the traditional arts. These kinds of strategies created an image of control over the political and moral content of the arts, rather than improving aesthetic quality. In this sense, Taman Mini was part of the larger cultural engineering project during the Suharto era. Instead of appreciating the diversity of the cultures exhibited, harmony and a clean image of Indonesia were deemed more important. Hence Taman Mini may be seen as a tool of cultural reproduction through education as a part of the reproduction of the whole social system. Education in modern society, including through this ethnographic park, was used to reproduce the culture of the dominant class for the elite to continue to have their power.<sup>20</sup>

### Official narratives

In an official publication, *Apa dan siapa Taman Mini*, there is a statement that the park is meant to preserve Indonesian culture and serve as an educational tool for younger generations. Ibu Tien stated that 'We may call it a museum now because someday everything in it will be antique.'<sup>21</sup> Taman Mini is modelled on an ethnology museum, with copies of traditional architecture constructed from authentic materials. In reality, the ornaments and interiors displayed in each pavilion usually represent a mix of different cultures from the same province.

As mentioned, the idea of an open-air ethnographic park is related to the international exhibitions held in Europe and the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that comprised of pavilions presenting and marketing new technology and culture, including the products and cultures of colonised countries.

20 Pierre Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron, *Reproduction in education, society and culture*, trans. R. Nice (London: Sage, 1990).

21 Pemberton, 'Recollections from "Beautiful Indonesia"', p. 256.

Tony Bennet calls the nineteenth century international exhibitions and museums ‘an exhibitionary complex’ related to power and knowledge because they were intended to demonstrate the superiority of the host nation.<sup>22</sup> Since the organisers, displays and most of the visitors were from the West, non-Western people occupied spaces outside the main halls, sometimes as part of the exhibits themselves, performing indigenous dances and making handicrafts in model villages.

In 1883, the Netherlands organised the first international colonial exhibition in Amsterdam intended to demonstrate the progress brought by Dutch colonisation to the East Indies for a European audience.<sup>23</sup> The Dutch built replicas of Indies architecture and brought local people, including artisans and dancers, to present an image of authentic kampong life.

In 1910, the Dutch and some Balinese kings opened the Bali Museum in Denpasar. The reason for opening the museum was to preserve local culture and cater to the rise of tourism in Bali, as well as dissolve the negative image of the Dutch during their violent invasion of the island by showcasing their modernisation of Bali. Along with wider international recognition of a unique Balinese culture, the colonial Dutch administrators and scholars wanted to make Bali a ‘living museum’ of classical culture by emphasising how the Balinese practised their culture in every aspect of life. The Dutch architect Pieter Adriaan Jacobus Moojen designed the museum and placed it near the former royal palace of Denpasar, which was burnt to the ground during the Dutch interference in Bali.<sup>24</sup> The museum became the first museum in Asia that presented open-air displays of traditional buildings. Later on, Moojen and a young Dutch architect, W.J.G. Zweedijk, used Balinese architecture for the Netherlands Pavilion at the 1931 Paris International Colonial Exhibition.<sup>25</sup>

The same strategy of using Balinese architecture to symbolise the Indonesian archipelago reappeared decades later, this time by the independent state, in Taman Mini’s Indonesia Museum, inaugurated in April 1980 and located near the main entrance, which presents artefacts and costumes from around the nation. The Balinese architect, Ida Bagus Tugur, used the Balinese philosophy of balance in nature, with the main building placed in a courtyard encircled by a pond. Balinese culture was renowned for fostering national identity and tourism, and was seen as complementing the centrality of the Sasono Langen Budoyo complex in Taman Mini.<sup>26</sup> The use of tourism to restore Indonesia’s image after the 1965 coup and the large-scale massacres that followed resembles the strategy used by the Dutch to restore their image earlier that century. Moreover, this signified a corresponding vision of the two powers in different eras, Dutch colonial and the New Order: the

22 Tony Bennett, ‘The exhibitionary complex’, *New Formations* 4 (1988): 73–102.

23 Frances Gouda, *Dutch culture overseas: Colonial practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995).

24 Moojen was a Dutch architect who worked on the restoration of temples in Bali after the big earthquake in 1906 and wrote some books on Balinese art and architecture.

25 Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880–1931*, trans. Beverly Jackson (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006).

26 Michel Picard, ‘Cultural tourism, nation-building and regional culture: The making of a Balinese identity’, in *Tourism, ethnicity and the state in Asian and Pacific societies*, ed. Michel Picard and Robert E. Wood (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997).

use of Balinese culture which was more famous in the international arena than other Indonesian cultures.

Open-air ethnographic museums are connected to a wider tradition of European cultural parks such as Skansen in Sweden. The founder of Skansen, Arthur Hazelius, opened this first open-air museum in 1891 and presented authentic Swedish farm-houses to generate nationalism through ethnography. Since then, Skansen has been known as Sweden in miniature. The distinction between the nineteenth-century museums and open-air museums was that the former excluded the lower classes from their narratives whereas the latter elicited popular memory and then restyled it. The pavilions for nineteenth-century exhibitions and museums were temporary, but the pavilions in open-air museums were permanent, sometimes newly built, and placed less emphasis on authenticity. As in Skansen, in Taman Mini, as described earlier, more buildings may be added, subject to negotiation between the government, the park authorities, and the public, to accommodate social and political changes.

Taman Mini Indonesia Indah is a park (*taman*) that shows a miniature (*mini*) version of the Indonesian culture. However, it is an environment controlled by the government and the displays become beautiful (*indah*) and organised versions of Indonesian cultures. Even though the general idea is to present a scaled-down version of Indonesia, the traditional houses on site are larger than their originals. The Sasono Langen Budoyo in the Javanese complex has the largest scale of all traditional buildings, which may add to the impression of Javanese culture as being at the core of Indonesian culture. On the other hand, the map in the lake is a miniature version of Indonesia, and the replicas of the Buddhist temple of Borobudur and the Hindu temple of Prambanan are much smaller than their originals. The simultaneous use of contrasting scales and the sanitised exhibits arguably intensify the idea of the government's authority, appropriation, and control of national history and culture.

The notion of 'miniature worlds' developed as spaces of consumption that created seemingly realistic places with images that not only bear the tangible qualities of material reality but also serve as a representation of a fantasy.<sup>27</sup> Opened in 1952 Madurodam in the Netherlands was one of the early 'country in miniature' parks. Unlike Taman Mini, Madurodam is built at a consistent scale and its layout is supposed to be a pseudo-realistic plan of the Netherlands that grows radially from a medieval core; any extensions are decided by the mayor and the city council of Madurodam. When one observes or walks around a miniature park, one enters a private sphere where a sense of closeness and intimacy is implicit.<sup>28</sup>

There have been some similar strategies used to try to connect various indigenous cultures to that of the nation in Southeast Asia. In Singapore, for instance, the Malay Village of Geylang Serai, built in 1989, focused on displaying the indigenous, but now minority, Malay culture through a model of a Malay village, displaying traditional handicrafts and activities. However, since the project was not successful in attracting tourists, the Singaporean authorities closed down the village in September 2011 despite appeals to save the site. Currently, there is a civic centre called Wisma Geylang

27 Susan Steward, 'Miniature', in *On longing: Narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

28 Akiko Busch, *The art of the architectural model* (Hong Kong: Design, 1991), p. 11.

Serai, which houses a community club and a Malay Heritage Gallery. There is also a Taman Mini Malaysia in neighbouring Malaysia, which opened in July 1986 to display houses representing the 13 states. In September 1991, another park called Taman Mini ASEAN was added to the complex to display the remaining nine Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states, each represented by one or two houses. But the park's lack of historical context creates a feeling of a nonexistent present.<sup>29</sup> Instead of presenting realities of Malaysian culture, Taman Mini Malaysia is a kind of Disneyland that tells us about fake nature and culture, but claims to be authentic to satisfy visitors' expectations, as presented in tourism brochures.<sup>30</sup>

Sanitisation is a strategy used in some ethnographic parks to manage ethnic diversity through architectural and ethnographic displays. Taman Mini's displays help visitors to experience many of Indonesia's cultures that they would otherwise not encounter in reality.

### **Nostalgia and a utopia of unity in diversity**

There is a notion of using the past to advertise the historical unity and diversity of Indonesia in Taman Mini. Nostalgia for the past attempts to reconstruct a lost past in the present moment and constructs collective history as an ideal experience of the past that is often 'manufactured' and not based on experience. The term *nostalgia* is derived from the Greek terms *nostos* or 'return home' and *algos* or 'pain', originally indicating a form of homesickness exhibited by people on duty away from home.<sup>31</sup> The word nostalgia evokes a sense of temporality characterised by the asymmetries of the past, present, and future.<sup>32</sup> In Taman Mini, nostalgia stimulates a longing for the imagined perfection of the old days to which visitors want to return.<sup>33</sup>

The Indonesian state has long used architecture to articulate the notion of a shared history and culture to promote a national identity. Sukarno, who ruled the country after the Independence in 1945, took up an anti-Western political stand and wanted Indonesia to become one of the emerging forces in the East.<sup>34</sup> He wanted to wipe out the image of Dutch colonisation in modern Indonesia through national projects that used modern architecture. In the early to mid 1960s, projects like Hotel Indonesia, the National Stadium to hold the Asian Games, and the first shopping centre, Sarinah, were examples of how Sukarno disassociated the nation with the dark past and turned to modernist imagery to evoke the future of Indonesia.

Suharto, who ruled between 1965 and 1998, implemented many development projects based on modernisation equated with globalisation. Adrian Vickers argued that the appearance of order, such as the appearance of rational administration and

29 Gerhard Hoffstaedter, 'Representing culture in Malaysian cultural theme parks: Tensions and contradictions', *Anthropological Forum* 18, 2 (2008): 139–60.

30 Ibid.

31 Fred Davis, *Yearning for yesterday: A sociology of nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979).

32 Andreas Huyssen, 'Nostalgia for ruins', *Grey Room* 23 (2006): 6–21.

33 Arjun Appadurai, 'Consumption, duration, and history', in *Streams of cultural capital: Transnational cultural studies*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 23–45.

34 Vedi R. Hadiz, 'Indonesian political Islam: Capitalist development and the legacies of the Cold War', *Journal of Current South East Asian Affairs* 30, 1 (2011): 3–38.

elaborate ceremonies, was very important for the New Order.<sup>35</sup> The *appearance of order* was reflected in various ways, such as the idea of a national culture, the use of a standardised design for mosques regardless of the local character of a place, and the representation of national culture in Taman Mini.<sup>36</sup> In Taman Mini, it is the connection to tradition that makes nostalgia such a powerful vehicle for national identity. Following Marilyn Halter's idea of modern identities that are constructed through consumption, rather than through place-based production, visitors to Taman Mini understand ethnic groups and national identity through cultural commodities they acquire while visiting the park.<sup>37</sup> The New Order's national culture strategy can be seen in the promoting of symbols of national pride such as the national language and Indonesian Revolution.<sup>38</sup> The New Order also involved itself in culture to ensure that diversity would not put national unity and its own rule at risk.

The idea of a national culture is related to the idea of *puncak-puncak kebudayaan*, the 'peaks of culture', promoted by the nationalist, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, in his writings after 1945. The anthropologist Koentjaraningrat said that 'the national culture of Indonesia is all of the peaks and essences of culture that have value, throughout the archipelago, both old and new, that are national in spirit'.<sup>39</sup> Sanoesi Pane, a prominent writer in the 1930s and 1940s, also agreed with Dewantara that Indonesian culture already existed before Independence; however, the nation of Indonesia had not yet emerged.<sup>40</sup> National culture only consists of what is shared by all Indonesians, which means it must exclude anything created before the idea of a unified and independent Indonesia arose. Edi Sedyawati, the director-general of culture in 1993, said that national culture is not the sum of ethnic cultures but it is something that has arisen since the existence of the idea of the nation of Indonesia, thus around 1928.<sup>41</sup>

Nostalgia desires temporality and spatiality, and Taman Mini is a good example of the combination of both. One example is the creation of traditional houses, where a culture's past, which is no longer accessible, is brought into the present, making these buildings an especially powerful trigger of nostalgia. Taman Mini treats nostalgia for 'lost origins' as a significant focus. It offers nostalgic recreations of the past as a valuable spectacle in its own right.

The stylised architecture of the rumah adat, the central lake, and *sasono* buildings, for example, are a realisation of the shared glorious Hindu-Javanese past. Since there are only a few remains of the old kingdoms like Sriwijaya and

35 Adrian Vickers, 'The New Order: Keeping up appearances', in *Indonesia today: Challenges of history*, ed. Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith (Singapore: ISEAS, 2001), pp. 72–84.

36 Kusno, *Behind the postcolonial*.

37 Marilyn Halter, *Shopping identity: The marketing of ethnicity* (New York: Schocken, 2000).

38 Judith Schlehe, 'Concepts of Asia, the West and the self in contemporary Indonesia: An anthropological account', *South East Asia Research* 21, 3 (2013): 497–515.

39 Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese culture* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 116.

40 Sanoesi Pane, 'Persatuan Indonesia' [Indonesian unity], in *Polemik kebudayaan* [Cultural polemics], ed. Achdiat K. Mihardja (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1977), pp. 22–6.

41 Philip Yampolsky, 'Forces for change in the regional performing arts of Indonesia', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 151, 4 (1995): 700–25. See also Edi Sedyawati, 'Tari: Bidang seni yang paling maju dalam proses pembentukan kesatuan nasional' [Dance: The art form most advanced in the process of building national unity], in *Evaluasi dan strategi kebudayaan*, ed. Muhadjir (Depok: Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia, 1987), pp. 245–51.

Majapahit, people need a new symbol to bolster their pride in being Indonesian.<sup>42</sup> Both kingdoms were considered among the greatest in Southeast Asia and precedents for Indonesia's modern boundaries. Clifford Geertz described the phenomenon as a neo-Javanism meant to revitalise traditional Javanese beliefs and to return them to public favour by demonstrating their continued relevance to the modern world.<sup>43</sup>

In relation to revitalising tradition through new media, Jan Mrázek mentions the conflicts between tradition and modernity when discussing *wayang* on television.<sup>44</sup> *Wayang* on television 'cures nostalgia', especially for people living in a modern world and away from their place of origin. Television actually does not show authentic *wayang* but a representation or an imitation of *wayang* and what works in real life performances might not work at all on television.<sup>45</sup> *Wayang* on television attracts people whose lives are characterised by a conflict between attachment to a place with its traditions and modern displacement or mobility. In contemporary Indonesian society, people feel a degree of alienation from their own culture as well as nostalgia for things like authentic *wayang* performances. In general, media such as television and cultural exhibitions exploit people's familiarity with their culture.<sup>46</sup>

Taman Mini is closely related to nation-building, the construction of a national identity using the power of the state to unite people so that it remains politically stable. To be successful, nation-building needs physical and symbolic constructions that combine ethnicities in a narrative of common descent, history, and territorial power to form a state, with propaganda that promotes social harmony and economic growth.<sup>47</sup> Benedict Anderson famously compared two ways of 'imagining' a political community: the nation-state and classical communities. One of the characteristics of a nation-state is the idea of a nation being conceived as a map. The map is flat, bounded, and has clear borders. Many classical communities existed before the post-colonial nation-states of Southeast Asia, such as the traditional kingdoms of Java and Bali, some of which were seen as 'Indic states' modelled on the Hindu-Buddhist mandala.

A mandala is composed of two elements: the core (*manda*) and the enclosing element (*la*) with satellites of increasing complexity around a centre. The classical communities regard themselves as cosmically hierarchical, central and centripetal rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal like the nation-state. No matter what happens, the mandala structure of the universe in the Southeast Asia Indic state does not change even when, for example, the centre is replaced by a rival power. As an illustration, Geertz stated that the most powerful kingdom gains its power over their hinterlands not by military or administrative means but through intricate displays of the most refined traditions and theatrical self-presentation.<sup>48</sup>

42 Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, 'Notes on contemporary Indonesian political communication', *Indonesia* 16 (1973): 38–80.

43 Clifford Geertz, 'Popular art and the Javanese tradition', *Indonesia* 50 (1990): 80–89.

44 Jan Mrázek, *Wayang and its doubles: Javanese puppet theatre, television, and the Internet* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2019).

45 Jan Mrázek, *Puppet theater in contemporary Indonesia: New approaches to performance events* (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 2002).

46 Ibid.

47 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Anderson, *Imagined communities*.

48 Geertz, 'Popular art and the Javanese tradition'.

The imitation of a mandala is clearly demonstrated at the site of Taman Mini. The national map in the centre represents the boundaries of Indonesia and a symbol of a unified centre. The streets that lead around the park connect the pavilions and the museums, thereby showing an hierarchical relation to the centre. However, there is still the idea of the modern nation-state in Taman Mini connected to a linear model. For example, the area allocated to each traditional pavilion has clear boundaries.

Taman Mini remains a powerful site for the cultural production of national identity because it presents traditional exhibits that promote a utopian ideal of unity and diversity in Indonesia. Thomas More coined the idea of utopia in the sixteenth century to describe an ideal site and society. It is not a better map of the future that is needed to attain utopia but a more suitable map of the present. Taman Mini is appealing because it offers the fantasy that one is seeing a map of Indonesian culture. The items displayed are controlled and have become part of the official image of Indonesian culture, and the regional pavilions have become accepted versions of local architecture and culture. The selectiveness of the collections and the construction of national culture make Taman Mini essentially a utopian gesture.

Many Indonesian school children have visited Taman Mini, and this park helps to introduce them to Indonesian history, geography and culture as a whole by respecting all the different ethnic groups equally. Some small groups of visitors wander from one site to another in open-sided buses or a slow-moving tram. According to my interviews with visitors, most said that the park provided both an enjoyable and educational experience although they did not have enough time to absorb all the ethnographic details. They understood that the park was a sanitised representation of Indonesian culture, and surprisingly they did not seem to question the authenticity of the collections. One employee at the Central Java Pavilion stated: 'The whole complex had a collection of traditional Javanese houses; even the *pendopo* building is an exact copy of the one in Surakarta. When one wants to see the original *joglo* house, she or he can come here.'<sup>49</sup> The statement implies the application of the label 'authentic' is created through an evaluation of proximity to the original forms, rather than realism. Therefore, most visitors consider the traditional houses in Taman Mini as originals, and it seems that many (unlike the librarian quoted earlier) cannot differentiate between the originals and copies.

In fulfilment of its founders' vision, Taman Mini has become one of the most important educational and recreational spaces for Indonesians. Rather than looking for authenticity, however, many domestic tourists are more interested in recreation. Therefore, performances in Taman Mini are targeted at the domestic tourists' gaze, a point we will return to later.

### Interpreting culture

Reformasi, the era of democratic reforms that began after Suharto's fall, was triggered by the 1998 riots caused by economic problems and mass unemployment.<sup>50</sup> The main targets of the violence were the local Chinese who were commonly believed to be

49 Interview, Dec. 2013.

50 Kees van Dijk, *A country in despair: Indonesia between 1997 and 2000* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2001).



the main actors in Indonesia's economic activities, but there were also some casualties among the Javanese Indonesian looters too. The riots eventually led to the fall of the New Order. There has been a considerable degree of decentralisation of power, as well as rapid economic and social change in post-Suharto Indonesia. Provinces and municipalities are now autonomous self-governing units. Arguably, there is a more dynamic negotiation of culture than in previous eras. Yet, the idea of bringing the glorious past into the present through cultural landmarks may still occur. But the glorious past now predominantly refers to local history and culture in the provinces and municipalities.

A national history is constructed by a series of acts of power throughout the various moments of its production, and a historian has narrative power as a granter of meaning.<sup>51</sup> Thus, any history may be open to new interpretations. Arguably, post-colonial Indonesian politics might have blurred the boundaries between the state and society, but elites still use ethnicity to articulate their interests, as reflected in the new Tionghoa Cultural Park in Taman Mini.

The construction of the Tionghoa Cultural Park began in 2004 with the approval of the chairman of the Harapan Kita Foundation, former president Suharto, reflected the decision to accept the ethnic Chinese as one of the many legitimate groups of Indonesia. President Abdurrahman Wahid, known as Gus Dur, came to power in 1999. He wanted to revive the notion of Indonesia as a pluralistic and multicultural nation with his Presidential Decree no. 6 in 2000, which lifted the ban on Chinese cultural and linguistic expression in Indonesia. Although some Indonesians still perceive the Chinese as foreign and some Indonesian Chinese think being Chinese is about culture and tradition, not religion, Chinese culture is now deemed acceptable for public display in Taman Mini.<sup>52</sup>

There were Chinese living or sojourning in several port cities of Indonesia long before the Dutch colonised the region. In 1619, the Vereenigde Ost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), or the Dutch East India Company, began to trade in Asia and built Batavia as their trading headquarters. At that time, the Chinese were part of Batavia's population, as traders, craftsmen, and coolies, living side by side with Arabs and Malays. As they began to impose their rule, the VOC kept the various ethnic groups separate from each other, and often used the Chinese as middlemen. However, the peaceful relationship between the Dutch and the Chinese was disrupted by a massacre of the Chinese in Batavia in 1740. Following the massacre, the Dutch limited the activities of Chinese to their residential quarters in 'Chinatown'. To date, the pattern of residence developed in early Batavia is still reflected in Chinese enclaves in some major cities in Indonesia, such as Pecinan or Chinatown, Kampung Arab, and Kampung Melayu in Jakarta, Semarang and Surabaya, respectively.

Benedict Anderson stated in 'Old state, new society' that the origins of the New Order were in the late colonial state because it was no longer society but the state that

51 Tzvetan Todorov, *The moral of history*, trans. Alyson Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). See also Michel De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

52 Rika Agata, 'An Imlek perspective of Chinese-Indonesians', *Jakarta Post*, <https://www.thejakarta-post.com/news/2015/02/17/an-imlek-perspective-chinese-indonesians.html> (last accessed 17 Nov. 2021).

mattered.<sup>53</sup> As an illustration, the Dutch government defined ethnic groups throughout the archipelago as a result of demarcating communities with the same culture and locating them within fixed territories.<sup>54</sup> In many parts of the archipelago, the Dutch administered through local aristocrats. The autonomy of the state was related to Marxist interpretations of the state as a tool of the ruling bourgeoisie, and the bureaucracy of the ruling bourgeoisie produced the appearance of a rational administration and order. In Taman Mini, the government prefers to show the appearance of a rational administration and order instead of showing more complex local societies.

The Tionghoa Cultural Park has received some 70 billion rupiah from various Chinese associations both in Indonesia and abroad.<sup>55</sup> The Chinese pavilion was planned since 2003, and in 2006, Suharto signed the order to begin construction. The park aims to show that Chinese culture is an integral part of the Indonesian nation, exhibiting artefacts, photographs, architecture, gardens, and other items related to the ethnic Chinese community. In front of the main gate, there are big round pillars wrapped with beautiful dragon reliefs and two giant lion statues (fig. 5). Behind the gate, there is a large, open ceramic-tiled area that is big enough for 500 people and suitable for musical and other cultural performances. Inside, in addition to the Indonesian Chinese Museum, the Cheng Ho Museum, and the Hakka Museum, there are also replicas of a Chinatown, traditional houses, a pagoda and gardens with typical Chinese landscaping.

Some visitors to Taman Mini expressed their surprise and disappointment at the appearance of the Tionghoa Cultural Park when I interviewed them and asked for their opinions. They commented that the site was much bigger than that of the other ethnic groups, and the buildings looked very different compared to the other Indonesian ones in wood and other traditional material. The Tionghoa Cultural Park is also located in the outer circle, between the Fishing Recreation Park and the Indonesian Stamp Museum. From the outside, it looks empty, but it is surrounded by a beautiful garden. Instead of displaying *peranakan* or Indonesian Chinese culture, it depicts the culture of mainland China, resulting in a feeling of distance between the displays and everyday Indonesian Chinese culture.

It seems that the representation of Chinese Indonesians here refers more to the culture of mainland China that binds the Indonesian Chinese society rather than showing their national imagining as a non-socially exclusive group. There is a sense of identities in flux, either the persistence of Chineseness or assimilation to Indonesian-ness.<sup>56</sup>

53 Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, 'Old state, new society: Indonesia's New Order in comparative historical perspective', *Journal of Asian Studies* 42, 3 (1983): 477–96.

54 Henk Schulte Nordholt, 'The making of traditional Bali: Colonial ethnography and bureaucratic reproduction', *History and Anthropology* 8, 1–4 (1994): 89–127.

55 'Anjungan Tionghoa Seluas 4,5 hektar segera hadir di TMII' [4.5-ha Chinese pavilion coming soon to TMII], *Detik News*, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-1305901/-anjungan-tionghoa-seluas-45-hektar-segera-hadir-di-tmii> (last accessed 24 Nov. 2021). One of the supporters and donors is the Sultan of the historic Yogyakarta Sultanate, Hamengkubuwono X, who is also the Governor of Yogyakarta.

56 Thung Ju-Lan discussed identity among Chinese Indonesians and classified respondents under various categories such as: the persistence of Chineseness, assimilation to Indonesian-ness, a global identity, and those who felt that identity was irrelevant. Thung Ju-Lan, 'Identities in flux: Young Chinese in Jakarta' (PhD diss., La Trobe University, 1998).



**Figure 5. Tionghoa Cultural Park in Taman Mini.**

*Source:* Author's collection.

I asked some of my Indonesian Chinese colleagues if they had visited the Tionghoa Cultural Park. Most of them had not visited the complex, but they had heard about it. They said that it was better to visit Chinatowns and shopping centres in the Chinese community and business areas, such as Glodok, to get to know the culture of the Indonesian Chinese. They also admitted that they only had a limited understanding of Chinese philosophy because they are now mostly Buddhists or Protestants. In 1965, Sukarno's government recognised six official religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Confucianism. In 1979, the New Order government de-recognised Confucianism, with most Indonesian Confucians becoming part of the 'others' category or mostly registering as Buddhists or Christians. Displays of Chinese religiosity were prohibited, including public celebrations of Chinese New Year. Over time, some Indonesian Chinese converted to Catholic or Protestant Christianity or Buddhism, and the teachings of those religions became part of their way of life.

Confucianism has been recognised as the sixth religion in Indonesia since Abdurrahman Wahid's presidential decision in 2000. My colleagues, who were all Christian, said that they were not familiar with Chinese gods and philosophies. However, their families had very good relationships with other Indonesian Chinese families, including in business. To them, the Tionghoa Cultural Park in Taman Mini presented a distant culture, although they admitted that some aspects of Chinese culture, along with Christianity, was part of their way of life.

The change in Indonesia's official interpretation of ethnicity can be seen as reflected in the addition of the Tionghoa Cultural Park in Taman Mini, which signifies a considerable renewal of Chinese Indonesian culture in society. However, the Tionghoa Cultural Park's designers turned to Chinese classical architecture rather than localised and hybridised Chinese-Indonesian culture.<sup>57</sup>

57 Ong Hok Ham and J.J. Rizal, *Riwayat Tionghoa peranakan di Jawa* [The history of the Chinese peranakan in Java] (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2005). See also Yumi Kitamura, 'Museum as the representation of ethnicity: The construction of Chinese Indonesian ethnic identity in post-Soeharto Indonesia',

Still, visitors from all cultural and religious backgrounds are invited to take part in cultural events and performances such as the celebration of Chinese New Year and the regular Saturday morning Tai Chi class. These kinds of everyday activities—like the dance classes in the provincial pavilions described earlier—are intended to create cultural connections and overcome boundaries. In this way, visitors are encouraged to think not just of cultural differences but of the relatedness of all cultures through their participation in activities.

Each province in Taman Mini has cultural programmes that attempt to recreate authentic cultural experiences, such as traditional ceremonies, and dance and music performances that encourage visitor participation. The performances create an atmosphere of authenticity and intimacy with different Indonesian cultures. Most of the time, however, the dancers and musicians in Taman Mini are professionals from all over the country. Although some performers might find themselves with little choice but to submit to the tourist marketplace, the main idea here was the positioning of performances rather than their authenticity.<sup>58</sup> This means that the dancers wear traditional costumes and are conscious of being watched.

Since Taman Mini performers are locals, the audience seems to share the same feeling and sense of authenticity as the performers. The representations conveyed by ethnographic displays and performances mutually enhance the images of culture. It is while being their own audience that performers in Taman Mini may be most empowered, as they become a site for counter-narratives. In this way, the viewed and the viewer at Taman Mini are both active spectacles. In the eyes of visitors, it is the collectively acknowledged achievements and shared cultural content presented at the park that makes Indonesia a nation, without necessarily requiring a deeply rooted culture. The cultural collections and performances create a consciousness of as well as a connection to Indonesian culture and historical events.

Although this form of cultural and historical praxis instrumentalises national culture for political and economic ends, ultimately, it is the visitors who actively create their understanding of the national culture. In Taman Mini, visitors can readily experience the history and culture of the nation first-hand, because this knowledge is transmitted through interaction rather than in the classroom. During their walks from one pavilion to another, visitors may experience an emotional and sensory connection to the exhibits in Taman Mini.

The displays of traditional houses and culture in Taman Mini are generic and such displays are relatively superficial and non-threatening, and show limited aspects of culture that are accessible and easy to understand, such as costumes, music, arts and crafts, and housing.<sup>59</sup> Since there is neither an environmental context nor any sign of daily life, visitors can embrace them freely as a slice of authentic culture.

*Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 8–9 (2007), <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-8-9/> (last accessed 11 Dec. 2021).

58 Nick Stanley, *Being ourselves for you: The global display of cultures* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998).

59 Erik Cohen, 'Authenticity and commoditization in tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* 15 (1988): 371–86. See also Erik Cohen, 'Ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia', in *Tourism, anthropology and China*, ed. Tan Chee-Beng, Sidney C.H. Cheung and Yang Hui (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001), pp. 27–52.

The clean representation of ethnographic collections seems to sterilise the relationships between ethnic groups.

In contrast to earlier scholars' discussions of Taman Mini, some negotiation of culture does take place in the present day, especially now that visitors have more freedom to understand the collections. Many people consider the traditional houses and costumes worn by mannequins as authentic. And, with many new events being held at the provincial pavilions, traditional houses and cultural displays are no longer lifeless representations but emotionally significant, especially when the difference in scale between the ideal image and reality is included in daily activities such as school excursions and wedding ceremonies. For instance, one can compare the original costumes on mannequins with the ones used during wedding ceremonies held in the pavilion. There is a celebration of ethnic identities, and cultures and ethnic groups from the peripheries are being born again. It does not really matter whether the ethnic displays are sanitised because Taman Mini is no longer about the state's domination of culture but an opportunity to experience and understand a whole range of Indonesian cultures that is important.

In addition to creating a feeling of cultural and historical intimacy, Taman Mini also helps visitors to participate by offering a connection to historical events, not in terms of a chronological timeline but by stretching out time. This collapses temporal distance and presents history as overlapping moments within a shared space. What becomes important is not the sequence of events but the spatiality of history or events that happened in a particular location, as represented by the scale models. Accordingly, the past is ordered through a thematic spiral that spins through the past, present and future of a shared culture, rather than a linear chronology of events.

The overlapping moment within a shared space illustrates another negotiation of culture, particularly in relation to changes caused by the creation of new provinces. The houses from the new provinces added to the northern outer section of the park tell visitors more about the contemporary nation. Here are rows of houses from West Papua, West Sulawesi, the Riau Islands (fig. 6), and Gorontalo, North Maluku, Banten and the Bangka Belitung Islands (fig. 7). Some provinces such as West Sulawesi and Gorontalo want to show authentic houses, while Riau Islands and Banten provinces seem to emphasise that the peak of their culture lies not in traditional architecture but in the hybrid styles of local and foreign influences. Since the provincial governments are involved in the design, the selected house styles reflect a negotiation of the meaning of *puncak-puncak kebudayaan*. Rather than showing the 'peaks of culture', some of the newer provinces have chosen to reflect change and hybridity.

Banten province, for example, presents a mix of colonial architecture—represented through white walls and Doric columns—and local architecture in the roof style. This statement might refer to the fact that Banten already had a mix of Western and Eastern influences because of the long trade via Java's north coast. Riau Islands province also presents a modern yet traditional house painted orange, not a Malay house on stilts but one that reflects the various influences on Riau during a golden era as part of important kingdoms such as Sriwijaya, Malacca and Riau, as well as one of the world's busiest historical trade routes and shipping lanes.



**Figure 6. Pavilions of West Papua, West Sulawesi, and Riau Islands in Taman Mini.**  
*Source: Author's collection.*



**Figure 7. Pavilions of Banten and Gorontalo Provinces in Taman Mini.**  
*Source: Author's collection.*

In addition to the displays of ethnic groups, Taman Mini serves other purposes related to visitors' needs to hold family, cultural and workplace events. People may reserve pavilions for wedding parties, religious ceremonies, or company gatherings, and even use the gardens for group picnics or community programmes like classes on how to play traditional instruments. They choose to visit Taman Mini with their families so that their children can learn about their culture and even bring back memories of their actual homeland, elsewhere in Indonesia. Visiting Taman

Mini is more expedient because it makes them feel close to their homelands but is less complicated than a real visit. In this way, the park creates a memory as an ideal experience of the past or nostalgia for the homeland, to which visitors apparently want to return.

This kind of negotiation, between the official aims of the park's designers and how visitors create their own ideas about the cultural collections, occurs in Taman Mini. Human agency plays a significant role in Taman Mini, especially with the greater freedom to use the pavilions as described since the Reformasi era. The management even encourages such activities since they can earn some money from rentals. Indeed, as in the case of the Balinese pavilion, visitors from the same ethnic group use 'their' pavilion as a community centre for their cultural activities.

A similar attitude is perhaps developing with Tionghua Cultural Park, despite some inappropriateness of the displays and collections. Since there are public activities, for instance, weekly Tai Chi and the yearly Chinese New Year celebration, this too is another pavilion where visitors create cultural exchange.

In short, there are a great variety of activities today in Taman Mini. Although the park's official educational purpose is still dominant, as a compilation of Indonesian culture from the 34 provinces, there is still room for different interpretations. Recent additions at the periphery of Taman Mini add another significant factor to its previously understood official meanings. The popular Snowbay Waterpark and Skyworld demonstrate how modern attractions and consumer culture supplement the ethnographic park that previously served as a symbol of national identity. These additions also imply that Taman Mini is trying to sustain a modern culture, not merely struggling with the construction of national culture.

Last but not least, the periphery also has some newer buildings such as the Bayt al Quran and the Istiqlal Museum, the At-Tin Mosque and the Purna Bhakti Pertiwi Museum. These three buildings concluded the New Order chapter. Positioned close to the main street and the entrance, the Suharto family who helped found the park, created a new face of Taman Mini. Two of the buildings, the At-Tin Mosque, and the Bayt al Quran and Istiqlal Museum, are dedicated to Islamic culture, and the Purna Bhakti Pertiwi Museum is dedicated to memory of Suharto's service to the country.

The Purna Bhakti Pertiwi (built in 1993) is located at the park's west end, reflecting the sunset and the last stage of the president's journey. It is designed in the form of a *tumpeng*, the cone-shaped mound of rice served during *slametan*, the communal feast in Javanese society to celebrate any special events. The Bayt al Quran and Istiqlal Museum display the religious artefacts and works of eminent Muslim intellectuals from the archipelago, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. The At-Tin Mosque, whose name echoes the former first lady's name, is a grand mosque inaugurated on 26 November 1999, adorned with domes and minarets, built by the Suharto children to commemorate their mother who died in 1996. Each night during the holy month of Ramadhan, people who pray in the mosque are also asked to send a prayer for its builders, Suharto and his family.

### Conclusion

Taman Mini Indonesia Indah demonstrates the Indonesian authorities' efforts to preserve the culture of the nation through displays of the best of its architecture and

cultural objects in manicured spaces. The Suharto government chose to depict a sanitised version of ethnic community life and a utopian image of the unity and diversity of the nation. The cultural displays in Taman Mini are mainly intended for domestic consumption. The ethnographic park is imbued with a sense of nationalism, and the cultural exhibits and architectural models are largely taken as authentic by its visitors, which has led to the success of Taman Mini. From an aerial vantage point, people can understand the symbolic meaning of the park. However, at the street level, visitors seem to enjoy the park without necessarily absorbing its overarching political framework.

Culture as it is represented in Taman Mini provides observers with what they expect and offers an easy and comfortable way of experiencing heritage. Staged authenticity along with the absence of historical markers allows visitors to experience culture and history as a form of reality that would otherwise remain fairly inaccessible. With the addition of new pavilions, Taman Mini demonstrates that the negotiation of Indonesian culture continues. The new Chinese pavilion, for example, provides a contemporary experience of the ongoing interactions between the Chinese and other ethnicities and is a symbol of national imaginings and local negotiation.

This article argues that the version of history presented at the park is open to different readings according to visitors' subject positions and their knowledge of Indonesian history and politics. The cultures on display in Taman Mini embody continual negotiations between political leaders, administrators, curators, architects, sponsors, performers, and not least, the millions of visitors. Despite this, Taman Mini has successfully promoted the idea of an Indonesian national culture and identity through interpretive ambiguities and advertising ethnic diversity and unity. In the guise of entertainment, Taman Mini's pavilions serve as showrooms, full-scale ideal representations of the typical architectural characteristics of each geographical region, both to promote a particular political view and provide citizens with a sense of national identity. The displays of traditional houses may be understood freely, as Taman Mini is not only about constructed national culture per se, but ethnic creativity and individual understandings of cultures. To sum up, a visit to Taman Mini also offers cultural and historical encounters beyond any official script as it has become a lively place for cultural production and negotiation.