

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY BETWEEN INDONESIA AND THAILAND AT THE BORSANG UMBRELLA FESTIVAL 2023 IN THAILAND

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Abstract. This study discusses cultural diplomacy through the participation of Payung Geulis in the Borsang Umbrella Festival in Thailand in 2023. Cultural diplomacy is important in international relations, especially in introducing Indonesia's cultural wealth. Payung Geulis, as a traditional art form from West Java, faces challenges in maintaining its existence amid technological advances and globalization. The method used is descriptive qualitative, with data collected from documentation reports, limited interviews with relevant parties, and visual analysis of the event. The theories of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are used as an analytical framework to understand how non-state interactions and cultural activities can influence public perception and inter-state relations. This study explores the effectiveness, challenges, and impact of cultural diplomacy showcasing Payung Geulis on the international stage. Through qualitative analysis and interviews with participants directly involved in the festival, it was found that participation in the Borsang Umbrella Festival helps increase awareness and appreciation of Payung Geulis culture, as well as strengthen cultural ties between Indonesia and Thailand.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Payung Geulis, Borsang Umbrella Festival, Indonesia, Thailand

Introduction

Indonesia itself is part of Southeast Asia. As a Southeast Asian country, there are certainly several countries that are very diverse in terms of their political systems, economic systems, social and cultural systems, and security issues faced by each country. However, there are certainly some similarities between them. When diplomatic relations were established between Thailand and Indonesia, the two countries finally formed cooperation in various fields. It is also worth noting that the relationship between the two countries has a long history that has been built by the leaders of both nations. The diplomatic relationship between Indonesia and Thailand was first established in 1950, and since then, bilateral relations between the two countries have continued to improve up to the present day. Both countries have also committed to building stronger bilateral relations and generating ideas to address various regional issues (kemlu.go.id).

In this case, cooperation between the two countries in all fields has always been on the rise. Through this, despite the many areas of cooperation between the two countries, initially there was no cultural agreement governing social relations between Indonesia and Thailand at that time. However, Indonesia and Thailand also cooperate in the field of tourism, as both countries have significant tourism potential as global tourist destinations, such as natural tourism, shopping, culinary experiences, and introducing the history of their respective countries. Many Indonesians vacation in Bangkok and other tourist cities in Thailand. Similarly, many Thais visit Borobudur Temple and travel to Bali Island. The two countries share cultural similarities despite their differing religions. Thailand is a Buddhist nation, while Indonesia Most of the population is Muslim. However, in terms of food, customs, music, and dance, there are similarities between the two countries. (LIPI,2021).

Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Thailand, as reflected in the 2023 Bo Sang Umbrella Festival, faces a number of challenges, including limitations in program sustainability, differences in perspectives on cultural interpretation, and limited consistent institutional support. These obstacles have implications for the suboptimal utilization of cultural diplomacy as a means of strengthening bilateral relations. However, there are opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of this diplomacy through strategic solutions, such as strengthening community based cultural cooperation, establishing bilateral cultural forums, and involving young people in cross-cultural interactions. Thus, cultural diplomacy not only serves as a medium for exchanging national identities but also as a strategic instrument for expanding social networks, strengthening creative economic cooperation, and building a more sustainable foundation for Indonesia and Thailand relations.

Therefore, as time goes by, a bilateral cooperation relationship between Indonesia and Thailand has emerged in the social and cultural fields. Indonesia and Thailand must continue to strengthen social and cultural cooperation, because to strengthen cooperation through new initiatives by utilizing the creativity that is developing in each country (LIPI, 2021). In both countries, there is a similarity in this regard, particularly in January 2023. The Payung Geulis umbrella from Tasikmalaya City was selected by the organizers to represent Indonesia at the international event, the Borsang Umbrella Festival Thailand 2023, which was attended by various countries. (kemlu.go.id).

The Borsang Umbrella Festival in Thailand in 2023 provides an opportunity to introduce Sundanese culture, particularly the Payung Geulis umbrella, which is an icon of the Tasikmalaya region, to the international stage. The Payung Geulis umbrella is part of local wisdom. Local wisdom itself is the collective intelligence of a community derived from their life experiences, manifested in the cultural characteristics they possess. This local wisdom is an asset of the Indonesian nation that must be preserved, even though global culture is currently having a significant influence on Indonesian society, potentially leading to cultural changes.

The 2023 Borsang Umbrella Festival in Thailand is an event promoting world peace, framed within an international arts festival and cultural exchange. Indonesia is participating by showcasing the traditional Payung Geulis umbrella craftsmanship from Tasikmalaya. Additionally, the festival aims to promote the cultural arts of Indonesia and Thailand through the Borsang Umbrella Festival, highlighting the shared cultural roots of both nations and thereby strengthening the positive relationship between them in the future

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the umbrella diplomacy phenomenon carried out by Indonesia at the 2023 Bo Ang Umbrella Festival. Data was collected through literature and documentation studies, by collecting and analyzing secondary data from official reports, news articles, social media, and publications related to the festival. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants directly involved in the event, such as umbrella craftsmen from Indonesia. The collected data was then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data triangulation was carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings by comparing information from different sources.

Result and Discussion

Referring to what Lenczowski said, cultural diplomacy indicators include various elements that serve to strengthen international relations through cultural exchange, understanding, and appreciation of art and traditions between countries. According to Lenczowski, these indicators can include organizing and participating in international cultural events such as art festivals, which make it possible to introduce and prioritize a country's cultural wealth to the global community. (Lenczowski, 1998).

The Borsang Umbrella Festival 2023 is a major event celebrated in the village of Bo Sang, Chiang Mai, Thailand. This celebration not only marks the beginning of spring but also serves as an opportunity to honor the traditional umbrella craftsmanship that has been a cultural symbol of the region for centuries. Bo Sang Village is renowned as the center of umbrella production in Thailand, with a complex and detailed manufacturing process that consistently adheres to traditional methods (Bonvoyage, 2023).

The festival runs from January 20 to 22, 2023. During this period, the village of Bo Sang is visited by thousands of domestic and international tourists who are interested in this unique umbrella culture and craftsmanship. Various exciting events have been scheduled, including an umbrella parade, cultural performances, craft exhibitions, and even an umbrella beauty contest. Participants can also watch the umbrella making demonstration firsthand, allowing them to get a closer look at this complex yet beautiful process.

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According to Anne Anggraeni, the Indonesian Umbrella Festival and the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival in Thailand have established a close partnership as “sister festivals.” This collaboration aims to enhance cultural interaction between the two countries. Through Indonesia's participation in the festival in Thailand, as occurred in 2018 and 2022, the promotion of Indonesian culture and tourism can be effectively carried out, attracting the attention of international visitors.

In 2023, the traditional Geulis umbrella from Tasikmalaya will have the opportunity to be featured at the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival in Thailand. According to Anni, the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival in Thailand is an important moment to introduce the Geulis umbrella, a traditional craft from Tasikmalaya, to the world. This festival not only celebrates the beauty of traditional umbrellas but also serves as a platform to promote local crafts rich in cultural value. By showcasing the Geulis Umbrella, artisans can demonstrate the uniqueness of its design and traditional craftsmanship techniques passed down through generations. In this festival, the Geulis Umbrella functions as a symbol of the elegant Sundanese culture. Visitors can witness the umbrella-making process firsthand, from selecting bamboo to painting motifs inspired by nature. These demonstrations provide insight into the skills and precision required to create each umbrella, thereby enhancing appreciation for this handmade craft.

Cultural Diplomacy between Indonesia and Thailand

Cultural diplomacy is one of the soft power strategies used by countries to strengthen their positive image and strengthen bilateral relations. Indonesia and Thailand, as two Southeast Asian countries with rich historical and cultural backgrounds, utilize festivals as a space for cultural interaction. The Bo Sang Umbrella Festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand, known as an annual celebration of umbrella craftsmanship, serves as a strategic platform for Indonesia to participate. In 2023, Indonesia showcased the Payung Geulis from West Java as a cultural representation. This participation not only serves as a platform for promoting local art but also as a medium for cultural diplomacy that expands the scope of community relations between the two nations.

The collaboration between Indonesia and Thailand through the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival 2023 reflects a strong and mutually beneficial cultural synergy. This festival is not only an event to showcase umbrella crafts, but also a platform to strengthen relations between countries. With the presence of Indonesian delegates, including craftsmen and artists, this festival provides an opportunity to introduce Indonesian culture, especially from Tasikmalaya, to an international audience.

One important aspect of this cooperation is tourism promotion. Through participation in the festival, Indonesia seeks to attract Thai tourists to visit various destinations in the country. The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism supports this initiative by providing facilities and logistical support for participants so that they can showcase their products and culture to the fullest (Ivan, 2023). This is expected to increase the number of Thai tourists visiting Indonesia.

In the Indonesian context, cultural diplomacy is used to showcase national identity while promoting local cultural diversity. Thailand is also actively using art festivals as a means of promoting culture and tourism. The convergence of these two interests is evident in the 2023 Bo Sang Umbrella Festival in Chiang Mai, which brings together Indonesia's Payung Geulis with traditional Thai umbrellas. Indonesia's participation in the event demonstrates how traditional art can serve as a tool for diplomacy to strengthen positive perceptions and foster cross-cultural dialogue. (Kurniawan, 2023)

Participation in the Bo Sang Festival also opens up opportunities for Payung Geulis craftsmen to establish cooperation with international communities. Through interaction with craftsmen from various countries, they can exchange ideas and techniques, as well as explore possibilities for innovation in product design and marketing. This is important for maintaining the relevance of Payung Geulis in the global market. In addition, the festival ini menjadi ajang edukasi bagi generasi muda tentang pentingnya melestarikan warisan budaya. This serves as an educational opportunity for the younger generation about the importance

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of preserving cultural heritage. By educating children and teenagers about the historical and aesthetic value of Payung Geulis, it is hoped that they will appreciate and preserve this traditional craft. Activities such as workshops and seminars during the festival can be effective means of achieving this goal.

Challenges and obstacles

local creative products. By participating, Indonesia not only introduced Payung Geulis crafts, but also affirmed its commitment to building cross-cultural dialogue. This collaboration shows how cultural diplomacy can become a space for the exchange of identities, where Indonesian local culture is placed side by side with Thai cultural heritage, giving rise to harmonious coexistence.

Indonesia's presence at the festival also expanded the scope of people-to-people diplomacy. Direct interaction between artisans, artists, and the community created a deeper cross-cultural understanding. This not only increased the Thai public's appreciation of Indonesian culture, but also opened up opportunities for cooperation in the creative industries, tourism, and education. As emphasized by Kurniawan (2023), cultural diplomacy carried out in the form of art exchanges or festivals can enhance positive perceptions of Indonesia among the international community.

However, Anne also mentioned that there were several obstacles encountered in the field. Among them was facing several obstacles in performing Payung Geulis at the Borsang Umbrella Festival 2023. Despite showing positive results, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy through participation in the Bo Sang Festival 2023 still faces several challenges. First, limited international promotion means that Indonesian culture is not yet widely known by global audiences. Second, the continuity of cultural diplomacy programs needs to be strengthened to ensure participation does not end at a single event but continues in the form of long-term collaboration. Third, support from the government, embassies, and local art communities is necessary to strengthen Indonesia's cultural diplomacy position in the region. With continuous evaluation and strategy, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy has the potential to be more effective in strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing the nation's image on the global stage.

In addition, Anne emphasized that the lack of government support in terms of funding was also an important factor in their success. Active involvement from relevant parties in promoting Payung Geulis would greatly help to increase the visibility of the product. However, due to insufficient material support from the local government, efforts to introduce this unique craft from Tasikmalaya to the international market were hampered.

Solution

Indonesia's participation through Payung Geulis at the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival 2023 has indeed had a positive impact on the nation's image and bilateral relations with Thailand. However, there are a number of challenges, such as limited promotion, program continuity, and minimal cross-sector support. To that end, several solutions can be offered to make cultural diplomacy more effective and sustainable.

The Indonesian government, for example, can strengthen coordination between ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Education and Culture so that cultural promotion is more integrated. This approach is in line with Nye's (2004) view that soft power is only effective when supported by a consistent institutional strategy. With institutional synergy, Indonesia's cultural promotion can be more competitive and sustainable than merely incidental participation in festivals.

In addition, cultural diplomacy can be strengthened through the empowerment of local communities and artists as non-state actors. Their involvement not only enhances the authenticity of cultural representation but also expands the reach of diplomacy to the community level. According to Ang, Isar, & Mar (2015), cultural diplomacy involving non-state actors tends to be more inclusive and effective in building cross-national trust. Therefore, Indonesia and Thailand can promote programs artist residencies, artisan exchanges, and joint workshops as a follow-up to the 2023 Bo Sang Umbrella Festival.

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The evaluation of cultural diplomacy also needs to include the use of digital technology. Social media and online platforms can be used as a means of expanding the audience and maintaining cultural relations after the festival is over. A study by Melissen (2005) emphasizes that modern public diplomacy requires technological adaptation so that cultural messages can reach global audiences more quickly and effectively. With this digitalization strategy, Indonesian-Thai cultural diplomacy is not limited to physical meetings but is also capable of creating sustainable interactions.

Finally, another important solution is to strengthen the bilateral cooperation framework focused on people-to-people contact. The two countries can initiate annual cultural forums, arts scholarships, and joint festivals held alternately in Indonesia and Thailand. An evaluation of the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival 2023 experience shows that cultural collaboration not only enhances positive image but also opens up broader creative economic opportunities. As stated by Riordan (2019), reciprocal cultural diplomacy can deepen mutual understanding while strengthening the stability of inter-state relations.

Cultural Diplomacy Perspective

Cultural diplomacy is an important instrument in bilateral relations between Indonesia and Thailand. Through culture-based diplomacy, the two countries can build a deeper cross-border understanding while strengthening their respective national images. Cultural diplomacy also functions as a form of soft power that is more easily accepted by the public because it is non-confrontational and emphasizes shared values. Indonesia's participation in the Bo Sang Umbrella Festival in Thailand in 2023 is a concrete example of cultural diplomacy in practice. By showcasing the traditional Payung Geulis umbrellas from West Java, Indonesia not only introduced its cultural heritage but also strengthened its ties with Thailand through the medium of art and local traditions. This festival demonstrates that cultural interaction can strengthen inter-state relations without always relying on formal political diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy also contributes to the creative economy and tourism sectors. Cultural festivals such as Bo Sang Umbrella not only showcase handicraft products, but also open up opportunities for economic cooperation and strengthen tourism promotion between the two countries. Thus, cultural diplomacy not only builds image, but also generates concrete economic benefits for the community. Despite its great potential, cultural diplomacy still requires sustainability so that it does not become merely ceremonial. Indonesia and Thailand need to establish a more structured framework for cultural cooperation, such as joint cultural forums or regular artist exchange programs. Through such initiatives, cultural diplomacy can function not only as a symbol of friendship but also as a long-term instrument to strengthen bilateral relations.

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