

# **READING INDONESIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY THROUGH VISUAL NARRATIVE OF THE PAVILION OF INDONESIA AT WORLD EXPO 1964 - 2012**

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## **Abstract**

World Expo is a world-class event which is an arena for participating countries to reveal their identity through symbols of nationhood, culture and organization they possess. Using visual narrative through pavilion design, we are able to read the messages a government or state would like to convey both straightforwardly and hidden in ideology. This research is a descriptive research which makes use of various documents such as photographs, articles in newspapers, magazines, sites and a number of books. This research aims at disclosing how the concept of Indonesian historiography which is described in the exhibition arrangement of Indonesian pavilion by fully identifying all the pavilions. This research shows some uniformity of historiography pattern; it shows connectedness between the golden days of Indonesia in the past and the success story of Indonesia's development (in the context of the time the Expo took place).

Keywords: exhibition, visual narrative, historiography, World Expo

## **BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

Exhibition is a communication media which engage a process of integration unifying architecture, interior, graphic, electronic and digital media, lighting, audio and other design-related discipline of which the objective is to provide fascinating, influential, understandable and easily accessible information for the visitors. Exhibition is basically a combination between communication design and environment design that go well together.

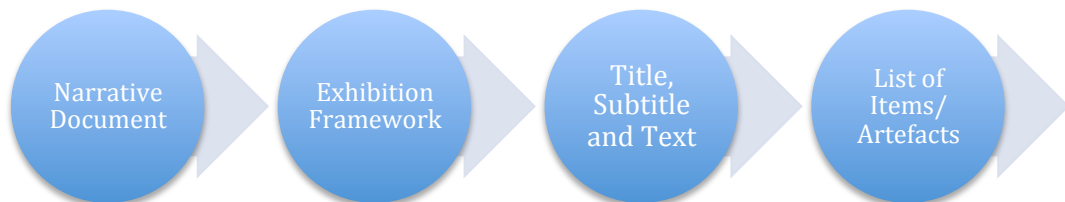
Exhibition at the World Expo is regarded as one of the products resulting from such combination. World Expo is the world's greatest non-commercial exhibition. This monumental World Expo event is a huge positive influence for the international world. For that reason the participating countries make so many efforts to act as the host of World Expo. The following are some reasons and goals of the country wishing to become the host of this world scale event: (1) constructing regional and country image for the location (nation branding); (2) Developing the Expo location and infrastructures; (3) attracting visitors as many as possible; (4) creating employment opportunities and economic benefits for the locals (The Expobook, 2010). For the participants World Expo's exhibition is a good opportunity to publicize and promote their inventions of which their impact bring changes for the advancement of the world's economic, culture, science and technology (En. Exo 2010.cn).

Exhibition is a communication media and in it is continuous process. The message provider could be an organization or group that wishes to convey certain message. At World Expo, the message sender is the owner of the pavilion which is the government of particular country. The government conveys message of many themes like history, culture and many other things by means of exhibition channel such as display, audio-visual or theatre and a range of programs such arts and culture performances and workshop which will be received by visitors who are the message recipients. Visitors as the message recipients would respond through many ways and the responses will be sent to the message sender. That's the whole process that will continuously take place.

As other communication media, exhibition makes up of many elements that contribute to the totality of it. According to Locker (2011), the elements that construct an exhibition are: (1) Storyline; (2) Path; (3) Exhibition media; (4) Graphics; (5) Building space; (6) Power and Lighting.

Storyline is the outline of the story what the exhibition is all about. What the exhibition would turn out and how it tells story, it's the storyline that will determine the forms of the other elements that make up the exhibition. The elements of informative nature that make up the storyline of the exhibition are described more clearly in the following diagram:

Diagram 1. Elements of information that build a storyline (adaptation of Dean, 1996: 103)



Narrative documents construct the general framework of the exhibition classification and from every classification the title, subtitle and text can be written along with the captions of items and artefacts to be displayed.

In World Expo's exhibition, visually visible narrative in the display is of great importance. It serves as media that tells complete and detailed story of all the things to be revealed. The story which is presented in a synthesis of forms of stories could be called historiography.

This visual narrative becomes significant to be studied because as has been mentioned above, the World Expo's exhibition is not just an information media, but also the place for participating countries to publicize and promote the inventions which are considered able to bring change for the world's economic, culture, science and technology and also to pass on messages concerning the state and national identity by means of the national symbols, culture and organization they possessed which are arranged in the display of the captivating pavilion.

Talking about Indonesia, the exhibition at the World Expo has been its 11 times presence, since the Guided Democracy, New Order, up to the Reform era, this world-scale exhibition event has always been a strategic event to publicize Indonesia besides the fact that there is political considerations and interest of the government to reveal the position of Indonesia. Whilst pavilion is a media to describe the face of Indonesia which often time is done partially in the form of traditional buildings, cultural diversity by way of arts-related attractions like dances, traditional music and demonstration of the making of traditional crafts like making *batik*, making *kris*, carving and weaving, and so forth which directly show the diversity and plurality of the people and culture of Indonesia. The difference in terms of government and political and economic situation development in Indonesian since 1964 up to present is a strong background which indeed has somewhat impacted the visual narrative to be conveyed.

This research focuses on the visual interpretation and narrative. Interpretation is a

process to establish the meaning for the whole story of the past reconstructed and interconnected (series of facts constructed in such a way to build a connection. Historical facts are not synonymous with historical data of one particular event. Facts taking the form of data obtained from the historical sources go separately and they need to be arranged and connected one to another to become one harmonious and logical unity. On one side the events should be incorporated into a context of other events surrounding it.

The process of interpreting the historical facts and the process of arranging them into an integral historical narrative has everything to do with a process of history selection. Not every fact can be included; the process involves selecting which is relevant and irrelevant. The series of facts should express themselves as a meaningful thread from the people's or nation's past. It's for the effort of establishing the meaningful sequences that the historian should do the interpretation of the facts. Sugianto (1996) argues that, it's in this activity that the historian cannot avoid subjectivity because to determine what facts that would fit with the meaning is usually based on personal tendency, on group's interest, on interpretations of theories and on the nation's philosophy.

Chatman (1978) constructs a theory of meaning-making properties of a narrative, which begins with the concept of storytelling, among others, by means of:

1. Narrating "Eye" :

Essentially, narrating eye means a way of presenting an organized space and time. Apart from that, narrating eye has to do with the organization of

works from the position of space and time. Narrating eye reports what are being shown, demonstrated, and seen as objective. The presence of this narrative is found in the pictures and the sequence which were composed by the narrator imagination. In other words, “eyes” leave traces in a picture on the space and time in signifying pictures.

This connection is the core of the discourse because it's this path that shapes the fundamental of the visual representation relation of sign-meaning. A narrative is written, meaning that these elements of spatial organization are turned into a view field (scale), view level (angle), view depth (perspective), view contrast (light and shade) and movement temporal elements (movement in one frame to another).

## 2. Picture point of view

In telling stories, a narrative should also be told from certain point of view. Although the spatial relation established by the eye capturing as a pictorial story is determined by a point of view that create the position to see it. This spatial relation may make up of “observing” position, for example, which the implication that the scenery has appeared as the picture world or maybe comprising of the position of “engaging” or “participatory”. This implies that seeing is regarded as “looking into” or “being inside” of a photograph of the world (Smit, Kenneth in Zettl, 1999: 186-188).

## 3. Narrative Genre

Although this kind of narrative is always not the same, like the children's books that are read repeatedly, they have a similar form of narrative that

people are quite familiar with. They have particular generic structure which is separated from the story's narrative "materials". Each form follows different transformational structure. For example, comedy transformational structure emphasizes idealistic point of view toward the universe while tragedy transformational structure affirms the realistic point of view. The repeated story structure is one of many interesting ways which reaffirms the values by means of transformational form. Chatman (in Miller 1990:71) argues that the strongest way to assert the fundamental of the cultural ideology is by showing it through narrative structure with the same story repeatedly told. In this matter narrative structure serves as the carrier of the cultural fundamental.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1964 World Expo in New York, United State**

Visual narrative in the Indonesia's pavilion with a theme "To Build the World A New" took the form of modern building with circle structure of which the centre is a big statue of five petals. The pavilion houses various aspects of the life of the Indonesian people in three major islands in Indonesia: Bali, Java and Sumatera which was featured in a display starting from the replica of the gate of Candi Bentar (the typical entrance of Bali's temple), Meru tower (Java) with seven layers of roof with based on stone statues taking the form of dragon and lion, the display of photographs and information on the country's history, its nature and

natural resources, display of more than 100 shadow puppet craft arts already performed, the demonstration of the Indonesian lifestyle. Moreover, this pavilion also offered first-hand experience of making batik, the making of wooden carved art works, carved stone, silver chiselling, shadow puppet and wooden puppet performances and a range of music and dance of many regions on the theatre-restaurant stage offering exotic Indonesian cuisine, and souvenir shop selling scores of Indonesia's craft products. In terms of visual narrative it is unveiled that historiography tries to tell that Indonesia is an independent, free country and a great nation with its high culture.

### **1970 World Expo in Osaka, Japan**

Visual Narrative was shown by means of the pavilion's architecture which made full use of the Borobudur Temple's essential with the flow of visitors made similar to the procession of circling the temple. Its wall was covered with a unique ironwood roof only found in Kalimantan. With 'Unity in Diversity' theme, the pavilion was designed with opening in the centre functioning as a theatre stage for dance and musical attractions. The information aid, artefacts, audio-visual and souvenir shop is arranged in such a way that it was located around the void. The visitors are able to watch the performance from the third floor of the display area which circles the stage. This country's crafts and traditional fabrics are so affluent with such high technique and the use of diverse materials were fully described in the interior arrangement emphasizing on hundreds of fabrics from all corners of Indonesia on the pavilion's ceiling. Analysing the visual narratives of this



exhibition, the historiography tried to unveil the hybridity between modernity and the archaeological legacy of Indonesia.

### **1985 World Expo in Tsukuba, Japan**

Visual narrative on the display is visually felt starting from the module modification of the building featuring the ornaments from Toraja and Bali complete with Candi Bentar and Bale Bengong Bali. The pavilion comprises of four zones” (1) Indonesia’s culture and civilization from the past, among others are Ganesha statue, replica of Toraja house etc.; (2) Science and technology presenting the duplicate of Nurtanio-made airplane which was hung in the second floor, Palapa satellite, Asahan Project’s mining products, aluminium bars of PT Inalum, a number of pictures describing traditional technology of ploughing rice field, tempe making, etc.; (3) computer-based multimedia showing the process of Borobudur restoration, dances and arts from Bali and Java, particularly the Gong Peliatan, which was displayed in Expo Plaza; (4) shop selling many kinds of crafts from all over Indonesia. Historiography through visual narrative attempts to unfold the development progress of the Indonesian people and the harmony between modern Indonesia which develops high technology without leaving the traditional technology.

### **1986 World Expo in Vancouver, Canada**

With a theme ‘A Nation of Thirteen Thousand Islands’ the pavilion of Indonesia participated in 1986 World Expo in Vancouver, Canada. The visual narratives were presented in a number of aspects such as: (1) the aspect of cultural affluence

and maritime spirit. This was done by displaying traditional boats of the Asmat tribe from Papua, Kalimantan, Madura and Bali as the strength and cultural wealth of the Indonesian people; (2) Diorama featuring the development transportation and shipping modes from traditional to modern; (3) Display of the artefacts featuring traditional communication system in Indonesia which has been passed generation to generation such as '*kentongan*' (a kind of bamboo or wooden tube to produce warning signals) up to cutting edge technology equipment. Overall, the visual narratives describe diverse culture and civilization from across the Archipelago relating to what Indonesia has achieved in terms of transportation and communication up to present. From such visual narrative the historiography attempts to unveil that there exists harmony between appreciating the ancestor's tradition inheritance with the desire and willingness of the Indonesian people to keep up with the era and technology advancement.

### **1988 World Expo in Brisbane, Australia**

Visual narrative was represented by the pavilion using the theme 'Cultural Uniqueness of the Nation', through the structure of Toraja House combined with modern building module of the Expo host. The displayed items included original art works (statues and crafts), replica, miniature model, photo mosaic panel, informational posters. The aesthetic elements that support the decoration for the environment as tourism asset: cultural wealth in the form of historical legacy, life system, customs, religious ceremonies (rituals), tradition, arts and natural affluence like marine tourism, lake tourism, National Park, Nature Reserve and other supporting factors such technology, transportation, communication, facilities and

infrastructures, stability, security as well as the advancement in economic sector and others. Aside from that, there was also a demonstration of the making of crafts such as batik, Timor traditional weaving, Kalimantan traditional weaving, Bali-style statues, Yogyakarta silver, audio-visual performance in Rice Field Theatre, dance and music from many tourist destinations in Indonesia complete with many kinds of souvenirs produced by the tourist destination areas across Indonesia. From the visual narratives, we could tell that the historiography tried to tell the progress of the Indonesian development in the efforts to cultivate and develop the aspects of culture, sports, recreational activities, natural resources, life system and environment supported by technology in transportation, communication and services to ensure security, comfort, safety, diversity and satisfaction of the tourists, especially in tourism-related activities.

### **1992 World Expo in Seville, Spain**

The display arrangement with a theme 'Technology, Trade and Tourism' featured the outputs of the development of Indonesia which took the form of building module modification by presenting Toraja ornaments and the outputs of the development which were exhibited in the form of diorama of the activities and strategic industrial produces (airplane model, satellite, mining products, etc.) and commodities and crafts from all over Indonesia along with the graphic information by means of pictures panel and audio-visual multimedia. Apart from that, the trade sector displayed the commodities of crafts for which the European market has interest the most whilst the tourism sector is presented in musical and dance performances from regions in Indonesia. The visual narratives revealed that

the historiography attempted to tell the development of today's Indonesia in the field of technology, trade and tourism.

### **2000 World Expo in Hannover, Germany**

The pavilion of Indonesia in 2000 World Expo used 'Earth Rhythms from The World's Largest Group of Islands' theme referring to the Indonesian territory that has 17,000 islands. The exhibition featured various artefacts of arts coming from diverse areas in Indonesia, both in the form of the past inheritance to the crafts of Indonesia today's regions. Apart from that, this pavilion also introduced diverse culture of Indonesia, among others the culinary culture of Indonesia by way of selling many Indonesian dishes like chicken satay, nasi uduk 'rice cooked in coconut milk' and typical Indonesia's fruit juices. From such visual narrative we could see that historiography unfolds the diversity and affluence of the Indonesian culture.

### **2005 World Expo in Aichi, Japan**

With 'Integrating People and Nature: Building of Eco Communities in Harmony' theme which was simplified into 'People and Nature in Harmony', the pavilion of Indonesia joined so many countries across the world as participants of the 2005 World Expo in Aichi, Japan. The theme was translated into forms of building, item arrangement and programs featuring biodiversity, diverse culture and tourist destinations and potentials of exported products and investment in Indonesia in the form of building adorned with Toraja's ornaments, combination of Indonesia's traditional edifices like the house of Dayak Mancong tribe in Kalimantan and the

granary house of Toraja and the arrangement of the display items combining with Indonesia's tropical forest atmosphere and the diorama revealing the biodiversity of Indonesia. Audio-visual multimedia featured biodiversity, tourism, achievement in exported products and investment opportunities in Indonesia and along with all that there was demonstration of the making of crafts like making batik, carving, and weaving and also dance and music performances from all over Indonesia. From its visual narrative it can be concluded that historiography tells about the cultural diversity and natural affluence of Indonesia that has existed since long time ago and survived until this very day.

### **2008 World Expo in Saragoza, Spain**

In this 2008 World Expo the pavilion of Indonesia came forth with a theme 'A Magical Journey through Times'. This pavilion was built in Sun Pavilion along with a number of participants from other countries. The building was a module adorned with Indonesia's traditional ornaments and a wall with a replica of the temple's stone texture. The display featured Indonesia's past water transportation in the form of display of ships from diverse regions in Indonesia and multimedia-audio visual that featured cultural diversity, tourism, achievements in exported products and investment opportunity in Indonesia and also the demonstration of crafts like making batik, carving and weaning and dance and music performances from various regions in the Indonesian archipelago. From such visual narrative we can tell that the historiography tries to unfold how traditional culture in the past is still preserved until today.

### **2010 World Expo in Shanghai, China**

‘Indonesia is a Bio-diverse City’ was the theme of the Pavilion of Indonesia in 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, China. The concept shows the diversity and affluence of the culture of Indonesia which underpin the harmonious social life toward a democratic and modern nation. Such concept is described by the module 4 pavilion form open, modern design using natural materials and elements such as bamboo trees and waterfalls, and displayed items which showed the long history of Indonesia, the diversity of Indonesia as a nation in terms of today’s social life, culture, environment, arts and so forth. The display of pavilion comprises three zones: (1) Bio Zone which describes Indonesian nature comprising tens of thousands islands spreading between two oceans and has two seasons was displayed with diorama about the sea life, mangroves, tropical rain forest and the Komodo Island; (2) Diverse Zone which describes the rich resources using many artefacts from diverse regions, Indonesia’s culinary world, Indonesia’s coffee and (3) City Zone which describes the early trading period with other countries in Semarang – with the arrival of Admiral Cheng Ho, the wealth of wayang art, local fibres and textiles developed in Indonesia for centuries. These visual narratives show that the historiography is about cultural diversity and natural affluence of Indonesia which have existed from long time ago and survived until this very moment.

### **2012 World Expo in Yueso, Korea**

The 2012 World Expo is the last World Expo attended by Indonesia. The pavilion of Indonesia used 'Discovering the Greatest Passage through Indonesia Water land' as the theme and it told about the maritime treasure of Indonesia. The main display which was presented in wide-screen spectacle (audio visual) told about the maritime wealth of Indonesia in a huge theatre room whereas the displayed items are about the maritime wealth and the past international trading taking place at the vast sea. Looking into the visual narratives it could be concluded that the historiography told about the lifelong international trading conducted by Indonesia through marine transportation. Apart from that, it also talked a lot about Indonesia's rich marine resources that have been well preserved until now.

## **CONCLUSION**

Delving into the eleven pavilions in the World Expo 1964-2012 in which Indonesia had participated, there is a similarity in their visual narratives which describe the original culture forms and the regions considered representing the culture of Indonesia such as Borobudur temple, Bali's temple entrance (locally known as Candi Bentar), custom house and decorative style of Toraja, Asmat statues, Kalimantan carvings, dance and music from Bali, Java, Sumatera, Kalimantan and East Indonesia which was added by the natural beauty of Indonesia like the rice fields in Bali, tropical rain forest, Komodo and coral reefs.

By means of the visual narratives discussed above, the historiography described in

the pavilions of Indonesia at the World Expo over the years were all the results of the interpretations of what had been the discourse of the ruling administration. Although during the long period of the World Expo the Indonesian government had changed several times, the discourse they have developed which was meant to assert their legitimation and to maintain the fundamental ideology of their power, they had taken the same narratives like (1) there has been always story of the cultural wealth of Indonesia in the past and present which has been packaged in a commodification of traditional cultural diversity of the Indonesian archipelago; (2) telling the achievements of the Government of Indonesia as a country affluent with diverse culture and natural beauty; (3) in terms of the visual forms and the programs held in the pavilion built by the next government of Indonesia, it can be concluded that they still carry the same ideology of the diversity of Indonesia. All the pavilions that Indonesia had built have the exact formula in representing the diversity of Indonesia, which has been done by making use of all the cultural forms and then partially presented them like a mosaic form, which is the mosaic of the diversity of Indonesia.

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