

The “Chinese” in Contemporary Balinese Performing Arts:
Stories, Objects, and Representations

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly publications on Balinese religion, arts, and culture offer a wide array of descriptions and interpretations of cultural practices on the island, often approaching practices of music, dance, drama, visual arts, and storytelling in a single study. While many of these works address historical and cultural influences from Java and India, few give serious attention to the appearance of Chinese elements in Balinese performing arts. This dissertation situates Balinese performing arts in the context of historical and cultural developments, paying special attention to the ways that local and national ideologies have impacted concepts of performance, ethnicity, and identity. In particular, the study considers several Balinese performance forms that contain “Chinese” elements and argues that an integrated relationship between story, object, and representation prompts the formation and emergence of a conceptual “Chinese”-ness in contemporary performance in Bali.

The fieldwork-based approach attends to performance as a process, and situates various Balinese artistic forms including *arja*, *gong beri* and *baris cina*, *barong ket* and *barong landung*, and *sendratari*, *drama gong*, and *fragmen tari* in contemporary contexts within and beyond Bali. Detailed description and analysis of selected performance segments serve to display moments where the negotiation between religion, ritual, performance, and entertainment converges with ideas about the flexibility of performance contexts and forms. The study widens its consideration of Balinese forms in Balinese contexts to approach an examination of the arts’ appearance outside of Bali’s local reaches. Reflecting on the continued flourishing of artistic, historical, and cultural links between Bali and Java, this dissertation suggests some ways that performance narratives expand and adjust to adapt to global perspectives and changing contexts.