



# Ancient Arts of Minahasa: A Public History Perspective

YUDA B. TANGKILISAN

**S**tudies of Indonesian history indicate a new development for analysis. Current discussions are not merely concerned with the problems caused by postmodernism, but they are moving to engagements in public arenas. This development leads us to pay attention to public history through which various research and activities have been conducted. The movements from publics (community) have made academicians aware that public history plays an important role in history and has shifted a new paradigm that history is not just dominated by the academic world anymore, but the public are more active in historical activities, analysis and discussions.<sup>1</sup>

This development is underpinned by publications or mass media, especially television media playing an important role in disseminating public history ideas, channeling historical ideas and writing. It is not clear yet why these television media have done this so far whether to fulfill slots or they are really encouraged to develop culture, especially

those related to history, which is well packaged. Besides television programs, a number of initiatives for safety, conservation and use of historical and cultural heritage have emerged and new communities have been established to save historical sites and museums. Those disseminating history around these sites can be history practitioners who have relatively wider coverage of this history dissemination to the community than academic historians who are primarily engaged with 'scientific' seminars and other activities.

Public involvement in cultural and historical heritage has been clearly seen and this community are the pioneers of historical writing according to view from within. Despite the absence of scientific matters in term of critical methodologies, the community, equipped with their knowledge of Dutch language, presents the writing of their country's past events.

When academic world development, including history 'science', reaches the horizon of Minahasa intellectual life, a number of historians who have history backgrounds have emerged and make a lot of products. Other historical activities such as seminars and meetings have involved the community which is interested in history but does not have enough formal education in history studies. The further development illustrates the fact that Minahasa history writing is fully embellished by Minahassanists (Indonesianists).

It is true that the non-academic historians' attention on Minahasa historiography continues and they are even more productive to produce related works and other history-related public activities, such as exhibitions, museum construction and art performances. In addition, they often take initiatives to dig up and reveal the past time of Minahasa.

### **Public history**

The phenomena of public involvement as discussed above leads to the development of public history.<sup>2</sup> Various definitions on public history proposed by the number of research institutes in America and Australia show that public history exists in the latest development of social history studies, revitalizes popular history and bridges the academic environment and the history-minded public.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, in observing this development, the discussion considers it in the long-term diachronic context whose advantage is to show directions, changes and dynamics. The sources used in such perspective are written works and activities.

The next analysis frame is concerned with what the history-minded public is. Historians previously knew the historical society, referring to

History Professional Organization, in Indonesia called *Masyarakat Sejarawan Indonesia* (MSI, Indonesian Historical Society), which consists of both academic and non-academic historians.<sup>4</sup> This analysis frame puts the history public which includes history academicians and non-academicians in a wider context, covering all professions and institutions who pay attention and actively involve themselves in history development both through history sources and historical remains. We all know that the past leaves written and oral heritages, like materials and oral tradition.<sup>5</sup>

These heritages are relatively incomplete due to several factors influencing their availability and continued existence. Regarding the cultural heritage of Minahasa, particularly material/tangible culture, Hetty Palm wrote in 1958 that a number of Minahasa ancient arts were missing and this case resulted from the introduction and development of Christian religion which did not give any room for the existence of these traditions and art materials particularly those in connection with religious rituals viewed as *bid'ah* (blame-worthy innovation).<sup>6</sup>

The re-excavations of the ancient Minahasa culture have been mostly conducted by public through numerous activities related to historical heritages. Some of these efforts are on the basis of ancient sources and some others do not use such things, reminding us of the fact that some of the findings are not scientifically accountable. But the public have done the activities much more productively than what academicians have done so far. Public history, therefore, as a meeting point for historical public for dialogues and interactions, energizing all maximum efforts in excavating, reserving, developing and using Minahasa ancient heritages for the sake of community growth and knowledge development. Minahasa ancient heritages should be promoted to national, regional and international levels.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Development of Minahasa Heritage**

In 1981, an annotated bibliography on Minahasa and Bolaang Mongondow which completes and summarizes previously written literary works between 1800 and 1924 was published.<sup>8</sup> Mieke Schouten, who prepared this work, categorizes the writers on Minahasa into several categories: missionary and *zending* (Protestant missions, colonial governmental officers and the retired ones), traditional law experts, naturalists, linguists, social science experts and journalists. It is actually difficult to trace back an early writing about Minahasa. However, we can see that Minahasa writers, among others such as L. Mangindaan (1860;

1873), A.B. Kalengkongan (1896) and A.L. Waworuntu (1893; 1894), have produced literature since the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the studies on the development of history writing in Minahasa upon the colonial period, Taufik Abdullah and Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo apparently proposed the frames of ideological history, value heritage and academics, showing the equality to a certain extent.<sup>10</sup> To make the observation easy to do, the simplest and most easily understood categories are Minahasa academic historians, such as F.W. Parengkuan, A.B. Lopian, R.Z. Leirissa, Bertha Pantouw, F.R. Mawikere (a young historian), Alex J. Ulaen, Nico S. Kalangie, E.K.M. Masinambouw, and G.Y.S Manoppo-Watupongoh (three of whom are from History Science on ancient Minahasa), and non-academic historians such as A. Pantouw (1926), J.A. Worotikan (1933) H.M. Taulu (1934; 1937), F.S. Watuseke (1968), R.H. Kotambunan (1985), Bert Supit (1986; 1993), Jessy Wenas (2007) and H.B. Palar (trilogi 2009). Academic historians from overseas (Minahasanists or Indonesianists) include Tim Babcock (1989), Barbara Sillars-Harvey (1984), Muriel Charas (1987), Mieke Schouten (1993) and David Henley (1995). Henley should be particularly appreciated due to his dedication and consistency in developing the ancient time of Minahasa through his numerous academic publications.<sup>11</sup>

The development of academic history writing shows the shifting paradigm of attention and themes. Minahasa history has been discussed in both politics and also other fields, like social, economic and cultural perspectives. Moreover, the methodological frames show the development from individualistic, structural approaches and linguistic structures. The death of some academic historians seems to result in 'an empty room' in research and writing on ancient Minahasa.

### **Minahasa Public History**

Attention to Minahasa's ancient times and culture occurs in academic life. But more attention is given beyond the academic environment which produces many historical outputs and has repopulated 'the empty room' through various academic and cultural activities initiated by the Minahasa historical public. This creates more opportunities for young historians to sharpen themselves to further develop research and writing on Minahasa history.

Referring back to historical perspectives on historical public activities, we pay attention to the existence of the number of kinship and social-cultural organizations and research institutes. *Kerukunan Keluarga Kawanua* (Kawanua Kinship Organization) is an organization where

Minahasa people who live outside this area, particularly in Jakarta (Diaspora) meet.<sup>12</sup> Some organizations which deal with the development of Minahasa history and culture are Yayasan Kebudayaan Minahasa (YKM, Minahasa Cultural Foundation), Kerukunan Antar Pemuda Kawanua (KAPAK, Harmony among Kawanua Youths), Yayasan Penelitian Sejarah dan Masyarakat (Foundation of History and Community Research), Yayasan Malesung Rondor (Malesung Rondor Foundation) and Institut Seni Budaya Sulawesi Utara (North Sulawesi Cultural and Arts Institute).

Most of these organisations are fading away and some have even disappeared from Minahasa historical and cultural development, except for certain ones which are mentioned above. Some of the founding fathers are Non Tengker, Benny J. Tengker, Bert Supit, H.N. Sumual, Benny J. Mamoto, and Jessy Wenas (a particularly solid, tough and dedicated individual). Through the *Institut Seni Budaya Sulawesi Utara* (North Sulawesi Cultural and Arts Institute), Benny J. Mamoto shows his attention in developing ancient historical and cultural heritage as a part of the national history.<sup>13</sup>

In a 2007 speech, Wenas stated that: 'a cultural movement – some of which are marked with series of research, seminars and symposiums, conservation and documentation, training programs/ workshops, arts appreciation, and festivals/ competitions covering all traditional art branches in North Sulawesi (read Minahasa, writer) – means to reserve and develop our ancestors' arts on which culture can be strongly built up for today and future generations.' The spirit and the objectives behind this initiative and the implementation of cultural movements are further illustrated in his speech: 'in the past Minahasa people exceeded other ethnics all over Nusantara. What are the cultural values grounding this excellence? A number of Minahasa's traditional cultural values are relevant, important to understand, and need to be reserved by the present and future generations. An example of these is a cultural value in the following proverb *tumani o rumapar* (leaving the kampong to set up a new living and to reach the peak of a success) which at the presents equally means the spirit of outward looking as a mental requirement to be successful in this globalization era.'

### **Bridging Historical Public Practices**

The question posed by Hetty Palm over six decades ago seems to be answered by Jessy Wenas (2007). Despite the absence of academic education in both history science and Dutch language, Wenas as a cultural elite, has tried to read old literature texts, most of which are

written in Dutch language to dig up and reconstruct the ancient Minahasa arts. His efforts are considered successful.

Certainly, as we are aware that the ancient time has inherited a limited number of footprints in the present time and the noble dream, but a utopia from Modern History Founding Father, Leopold von Ranke, an effort to reconstruct the ancient time as it happened (*wie ist eigentlich gewesen*), the efforts of excavation still leave the space which cannot be filled in because of time. Therefore, as well as rediscovery, this effort needs a creation based on an accountable imagination to answer the present soul challenges (*zeitgeist*).

Excavating, reserving and introducing Minahasa art heritage in numerous forums mostly initiated by Benny J. Mamoto show both sides, that is, rediscovery and creation (invention). It is true that these findings have not yet been taken fully on board by academic historians, particularly for research materials and inputs in the contexts of scientific research. However, this gap is closing due to the rise of Public history. The key issue is that behind the development of public history is the awareness that rediscovery and invention are not contradictory as long as these are underpinned with a scientific foundation. These efforts are parts of the development of national cultural heritage wealth which is complex and dynamic.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998 and Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (eds), *Public History and Heritage Today: People and Their Pasts*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See among others S. Benson, S. Brier and R. Rosenzweig (eds), *Presenting the Past: Essays in History and the Public*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986 and internet sites such as: <<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/history/publichistory/main.htm>, [www.publichistory.org/what\\_is/definition.html](http://www.publichistory.org/what_is/definition.html), <http://ncph.org/cms/what-is-public-history/>> and others.

<sup>3</sup> As the following definition: 'Public history is history that is seen, heard, read, and interpreted by a popular audience. Public historians expand on the methods of academic history by emphasizing non-traditional evidence and presentation formats, reframing questions, and in the process creating a distinctive historical practice. ....Public history is also history that belongs to the public. By emphasizing the public context of scholarship, public history trains historians to transform their research to reach audiences outside the academy.'  
<<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/history/publichistory/main.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Compare this with historical profession proposed by Kuntowijoyo i.e. history teachers, history clerks (ancient times, museums, archive and historical research institutes), history recorders (in some institutes, such as *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI, Indonesian Armed Forces), recently known as *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI, Indonesian National Army) and *Kepolisian Republik Indonesia* (POLRI, Indonesian Police), historical agents, historical witnesses, historical researchers and historical writers. An interesting point of historical clerks is that they have active contacts with public to disseminate historical awareness and it is said that this is not an easy job because they have to compete with global influences which sometimes give *ahistory* (without historical foundations) and *anational* (without national foundations) presentations. See Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah.*, Yayasan Bentang Budaya, Yogyakarta, 1995.

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- <sup>5</sup> Oral traditions are different from Oral History interpreted as a method to dig up the information from historical witness through interview techniques. See the history problems at *Sejarah Lisan (Oral History)* at Notosusanto, 1978, pp17-21.
- <sup>6</sup> Hetty Palm, *Ancient Art of the Minahasa*, Bandung, Masa Baru, 1958, originally published as *Majalah untuk ilmu bahasa, ilmu bumi dan kebudayaan*.
- <sup>7</sup> It is a wise thing that a hope is also given to Minahasa community in order to give them an opportunity to contribute their ideas and shares to Indonesian development. In this case, the ideas proposed by various experts on how to develop and make Indonesia better to become a reference, one of which is proposed by Hartarto Sastrosoenarto, *Industrialisasi serta Pembangunan Sektor Pertanian dan Jasa Menuju Visi Indonesia 2030*, Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta, 2006, pp101-104. To complete these national ideas, see Carmelia Sukmawati and Yuda B. Tangkilisan, *Perjalanan Pemikiran dan Karya Hartarto Sastrosoenarto Menteri Perindustrian 1983-1993 Menteri Koordinator 1993-1999*, Yayasan Pidi, Jakarta, 2012 and an opening speech by Benny J. Mamoto in Jessy Wenas Wenas, *Sejarah & Kebudayaan Minahasa*, Institut Seni Budaya Sulawesi Utara, Jakarta, 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> The periodical limitation is not strict due to the existence of the work of M.R. Dajoh, *Pahlawan Minahasa*, Balai Poestaka, Djakarta, 1949 and F.S. Watuseke, *Sedjarah Minahasa*, tp, Mando, 1968, p53.
- <sup>9</sup> Their complete titles are in Mieke Schouten, *Minahasa and Bolaangmongondow an Annotated Bibliography 1800-1942*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1981.
- <sup>10</sup> Taufik Abdullah and Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo (eds), *Ilmu Sejarah dan Historiografi Arah dan Perspektif*, Gramedia, Jakarta, 1985, pp27-29.
- <sup>11</sup> A.B Lopian, *Orang Laut Bajak Laut Raja Laut Sejarah Kawasan Laut Sulawesi Abad ke-19*, Komunitas Bumbu, Jakarta, 2009; R.Z. Leirissa, *PRRI Permesta Strategi Membangun Indonesia tanpa Komunis*, Pustaka Utama Grafiti, Jakarta, 1991; A. Pantouw, *Minahasa Lama dan Baru*, Manadosche Drukkerij, Mando, 1926; A.J. Ulaen, 'Kembara Budaya dan Diaspora: Amatan (dari) Luar', in Roy E. Mamengko (ed), *Etnik Minahasa dalam Akselerasi Perubahan*, Pustaka Sinar Harapan, Jakarta, 2002; A. Pantouw, *Minahasa Lama dan Baru*, Manadosche Drukkerij, Mando, 1926; J. A. Worotikan, *Geschiedenis uit de Sagen van de Minahasa*, 2 jli, Lie Boen Yat, Manado, 1933/37; H. M. Taulu, *Hikajat Hermanus Willem Dotulong, Opperhoofd of Majoor van Sonder, (1824-1861) en Groot-Majoor titulair bij de infanterie v.h. Nederlandsch oost-Indische-leger, (1825-1830)*, Manado: Liem, Manado, 1934; F. S. Watuseke, *Sedjarah Minahasa*, tp, Manado, 1968; Bert Supit, *Minahasa dari Amanat Watupinawetengan hingga Gelora Minawanua*, Penerbit Sinar Harapan, Jakarta, 1986; Jessy Wenas, *Sejarah & Kebudayaan Minahasa*, Institut Seni Budaya Sulawesi Utara, Jakarta, 2007; H. B. Palar, *Wajah Lama Minahasa*, Yayasan Gibbon Indonesia, Jakarta, 2009; David E. F. Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context, Minahasa in the Dutch East Indies*, KITLV Prest, Leiden, 1996; Muriel Charas, 'Une vue generale sur le pays Minahasa', *Archipel*, vol 34, pp49-62; and Mieke Schouten, *Minahasa and Bolaangmongondow an Annotated Bibliography 1800-1942*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1981.
- <sup>12</sup> See an interesting point on Diaspora Minahasa in A.J. Ulaen, op cit, pp400-8.
- <sup>13</sup> Read the achievement and award obtained by Benny J. Mamoto in *Revitalisasi Kesenian Minahasa* at: <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/records-7000/largest-orchestra-playing-on-bamboo-instruments/>; <http://umum.kompasiana.com/2009/11/01/seni-budaya-indonesia-dan-pengakuan-dunia/>; <http://oase.kompas.com/read/2009/11/05/07410886/Bakudapa.di.Pasang.Surut.Kolintang>; <http://www.fib.ui.ac.id/index.php?limitstart=78&lang>.