



## Garuda Wisnu Kencana: a piece of art, a part of history

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### ABSTRACT

*Garuda Wisnu Kencana* (GWK) in Ungasan Hill, South Kuta, Badung Regency is expected as a future tourism icon of Bali to attract domestic and foreign tourists. Standing firmly in the area of 60 hectares, with 121 meters high from base to peak, and 64 meters in width, make it as one of the largest and highest impressive figures in the world. The initial idea to build the statue was firstly sparked in 1989 when I Nyoman Nuarta met with Joop Ave. The project began after received approval from President Soeharto in 1997. Some questions and critics from the scholar did not budge the plan. However, the monetary crisis and politic situation that hit Indonesia in 1998, postponed the construction of this enormous project. The

project resumed in 2013 after I Nyoman Nuarta, met with The Ning King, the owner of PT Alam Sutera Realty. Alam Sutera acquired the project from PT Garuda Adimatra Indonesia. On September 22, 2018, President Joko Widodo inaugurated the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Statue. In his speech, Joko Widodo expressed his delight to witness the work. The statue proved Indonesia is a great nation that can give birth to a brand-new masterpiece. GWK Cultural Park offers not only a magnificent landmark but also countless tourist attractions. There are daily Indonesian traditional music and dance, lodging area, shopping center, outbound facilities, dining area and a massive venue for high scale event.

**Keyword:** Garuda Wisnu Kencana, GWK, Tourism, Bali

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### BACKGROUND

Located in Ungasan, Badung Regency, *Garuda Wisnu Kencana* Cultural Park offers an exotic beauty of Indonesian cultural heritage with the monumental Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue as the representation of Indonesian civilization. It is considered as the number one cultural icon in Bali. The symbol of Garuda Wisnu Kencana is a gigantic statue of Lord Vishnu riding the great *Garuda* as his trusted companion. Standing firmly in the area of 60 hectares, with 121 meters high from base to peak, and 64 meters in width. It is constructed to be one of the largest and highest impressive figures in the world.<sup>1</sup> The icon is confirmed as one of the greatest sculpture in the world,<sup>2</sup> after *The Spring Temple Buddha* in China and *The Laykyun Sekkyia Buddha* in Myanmar. The figure of Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) in Ungasan Hill, South Kuta, Badung Regency is expected to become a future tourism icon for Bali to attract domestic and foreign tourists.<sup>3</sup>

Garuda is a mythological creature in ancient Hindu manuscript. Its story is well known, especially among Balinese people. In the legend, Garuda is the son of Dewi Winata, one of the wives of Baghawan Kashyapa. The younger brother of Aruna hatched from egg given by Baghawan Kashyapa to Dewi Winata. However, at the time of his birth, Dewi

Winata did not accompany the process since she was held captivated by Dewi Kadru. When Garuda was born, he questioned his mother's whereabouts. Driven by his curiosity, Garuda flew to the sky, then he met Lord Indra. After hearing the story from the God of war, he realized that his mother, Dewi Winata was locked up and enslaved by Dewi Kadru, the other wife of Baghawan Kashyapa. Apparently, the reason was because Dewi Kadru tricked Dewi Winata when they were betting, and made his mother lost her freedom. The consequence forced Dewi Winata became a servant of 1,000 snakes, sons of Dewi Kadru. To free his mother from that place, Garuda made a pact with Lord Vishnu. By Lord Vishnu's advice, Garuda eventually can release his mother, after deceiving a thousand snakes to minimize their size. As a form of gratitude, Garuda becomes the vehicle of Lord Wisnu.<sup>4</sup>

The story inspired the creation of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue by I Nyoman Nuarta. Nuarta is a sculpture artist who was born in Tabanan, Bali. He is one of the pioneers of the new art movement in 1976. The journey of Nuarta in building this giant statue was passed through a long winding road for more than 28 years. The initial idea was sparked in 1989 when he met with Director General of Tourism, Joop Ave, the man who later became Minister of Tourism, Post and Telecommunications. Joop requested Nuarta to design and construct a

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**Figure 1** Garuda his mother, after deceiving a thousand snakes to minimize their size<sup>5</sup>

5-meter-high statue, that was going to be placed at I Gusti Ngurah Rai Airport. However, Nuarta, as quoted by Tempo, said that he had a different view. His idea was not to make a five meters high statue, but something more elevated and more magnificent. In 1990, they conveyed the idea to Bali Governor, Ida Bagus Oka who enthusiastically welcomed the proposal. Then the Governor of Bali invited Minister of Mines and Energy, Ida Bagus Sudjana to share his views on the plan to build the monumental work. The project was firstly announced to the public on June 1993.

## A LONG WINDING ROAD TO BUILD

The rumor about a high-expenses sculpture plan was spreading to the broader community, including the academic society. On July 7, 1993, twelve members of Udayana University Student Senate delegation came to the Bali House of representatives to question about the agenda. In front of the Commission C, they pledged several main points. One of the proposals was the relocation of IDR 80 billion funding for the statue to be used for development in other fields of tourism sector or poverty alleviation. Group leader, Widian K, as reported by Kompas on July 9, 1993 stated that Bali has a spatial regulation about maximum height of a building. It should not exceed the height of a coconut tree which is approximately fifteen meters. If the statue is higher than fifteen meters, it is without any doubt violated the law. Udayana University Student Senate delegation also conveyed other main points from the religious perspective. They concerned that the statue would have a negative impact on Balinese Hindus, whose average level of education was considered low at the time. They stressed since the figure was a symbol of Hindu deity, there were concern that some parties might mistreated it as holy figure to worship.

Some questions and critics from the scholar did not budge the plan. In 1994, Joop Ave, I Nyoman Nuarta, Ida Bagus Oka, and Ida Bagus Sudjana continued presenting the idea to President Soeharto. According to Nuarta as quoted from Kompas on June 9, 1997, President Soeharto approved the megaproject. Only one year after the approval, the project began in Ungasan. Ungasan hill, an area of a dry limestone hill, was cut and carved into a land canvas, for the project that took 28 years to finish.

Three years after President Suharto's approval, the first stone laying ceremony was held, a sacred symbol, as a sign of commencement for the statue construction project. Some art performances were held in the evening, the series of ceremonies involved thousands of people from various ages. The first stone laying ceremony undoubtedly invited pros and cons as well. The scholar criticized the construction of the statue. One of the scholars, Nyoman Gelebet, a spatial expert and lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering at Udayana University, expressed his view about the building. He argued that the creation of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue did not adjust with the philosophy of the Balinese people. Lord Vishnu is one of the glorified gods by Hindus. He pointed that it was somewhat inappropriate to place the statue of Lord Vishnu which should only be placed in temple, being treated as a guardian of a tourist area.<sup>6</sup>

Above it all, what appears on the surface of





**Figure 2** Gelebet, a spatial expert and lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering at Udayana University, pointed that it was somewhat inappropriate to place the statue of Lord Vishnu which should only be placed in temple, being treated as a guardian of a tourist area<sup>7</sup>

tourism in Bali does not necessarily describe the circumstances that happened. It turned out that the development of Bali tourism, especially those that require significant capital/investment, is full of problems and controversy in many spots. Almost all development of tourism centres or facilities, are carried out with conflict and violence, at least non-physical violence, through the process of hegemony, especially against the community.<sup>8</sup>

The monetary crisis and politic situation that hit Indonesia in early 2000, postponed the construction of this massive project. The head of the eagle and the figure of the Lord Vishnu have not been resolved to be a complete work. After delayed for almost fifteen years, finally the construction of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue could be carried on. Nuarta, who was frustrated because of his biggest art project never find a bright spot, then met with The Ning King. He is a property businessman who owned PT Alam Sutera Realty. The company later acquired the project from PT Garuda Adimatra Indonesia. although he lost all the right to own GWK, Nuarta decided as long as this masterpiece project can be carried on, he willingly accepted it.<sup>6</sup>

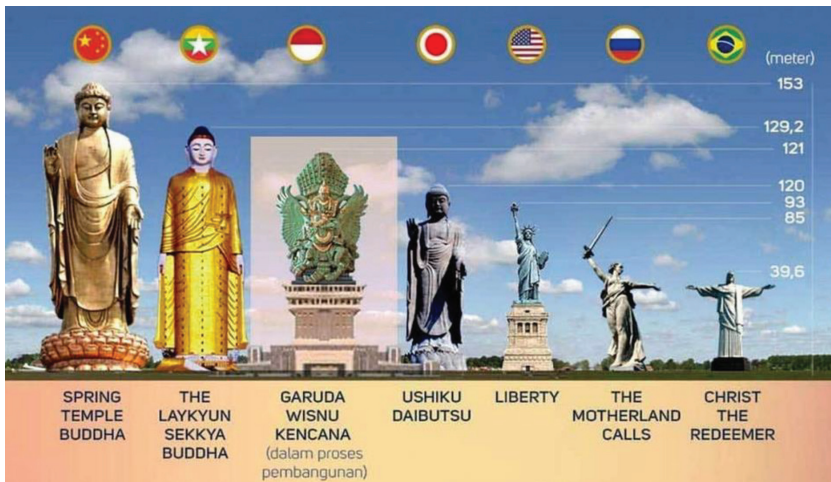
After experiencing delays in its development, the project resumed in 2013. This location is prepared to receive delegations of the IMF-World Bank annual meeting in Bali in October 2018. As a building designed for cultural tourism attraction, the GWK statue is physically designed to be able to withstand strong wind<sup>3</sup> and resistance up to eight magnitude earthquakes.<sup>9</sup> There are 30 floors in the body of the GWK Statue. From a total height of 121 meters, the statue is 75 meters, while the pedestal is 45 meters. In addition, the width of the Garuda

wingspan is 64 meters. The skin material of the statue is a mixture of copper and brass. The total weight of the skin is 900 tons, the importance of the steel structure is 2,000 tons, and the construction uses 21,000 steel rods.

## THE INAUGURATION

President Joko Widodo pressed the siren button that marked the inauguration of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Statue in Ungasan, Badung, Bali, on Saturday evening September 22, 2018. on the occasion, former President Megawati Soekarnoputri, former Vice President Try Sutrisno, Minister of Tourism Arief Yahya, Bali Governor I Wayan Koster, President Commissioner of Alam Sutera Group, Haryanto Tirtohadiguno and the initiator of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Statue Nyoman Nuarta accompanied president throughout the ceremony.<sup>10</sup>

In his speech, Joko Widodo expressed his delight to witness the masterpiece of the nation, the statue of Garuda Wisnu Kencana. He considered GWK as a masterpiece since the statue of Garuda Wisnu Kencana is one of the largest copper sculptures in the world. The completion of the masterpiece not only become a pride for the Balinese people but also for all people in Indonesia. President Jokowi added with the realization of the statue of GWK since the beginning of its construction 28 years ago, it shows that Indonesia is also able to create a wonder in the present. The task proved Indonesia is a great nation that did not only inherit the great works from ancient civilization such as Borobudur Temple, or Prambanan Temple. In the present



**Figure 3** The icon is confirmed as one of the greatest sculpture in the world, after *The Spring Temple Buddha* in China and *The Laykyun Sekkyā Buddha* in Myanmar<sup>13</sup>

era, Indonesia can also give birth to a brand-new masterpiece.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the technology to build the statue registered as intellectual property rights in the Ministry of Law and Justice. In the view of Jean Couteau, a French cultural researcher, this sculpture shows a well-developed combination of art, science, and technology in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the cost, the statue of GWK is apparently more expensive than historical monuments such as the Liberty statue in the USA and the Eiffel Tower on the banks of the Seine river, France. ABC News reported, as cited by Merdeka.com, the GWK statue is estimated to have a total cost of around USD 100 million. Meanwhile, according to data from Home Advisor in 2015, if the cost of building the Statue of Liberty is adjusted to the current rate (through inflation adjustments), then the price is equivalent to USD 10.6 million. Home Advisor also mentioned, the construction expenses of the Eiffel Tower are also below the Statue of GWK. If the cost at the time of construction is adjusted to the present, the estimated cost of building the Eiffel Tower was equivalent to USD 38.2 million.<sup>12</sup>

### WHAT TO SEE?

GWK Cultural Park offers not only a magnificent landmark but also countless tourist attractions. As a daily performance, there are Indonesian traditional music and dance, especially Balinese dance. Kecak dance collaboration performs every day at the Amphitheatre of Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park, Bali. Some good venues for taking photos and are available in the GWK Cultural Park area such as the Lotus Pond, Garden *Indraloka*, and *Tirtha Agung*. Lotus Pond is the main venue for the event in

GWK Cultural Park. In *Tirtha Agung*, that situated in the front yard, presenting relief of the story of Garuda Wisnu Kencana, since Garuda was born until it became the companion of Lord Vishnu.

GWK Cultural Park also provides lodging, namely Villa Acala. Located close to the exclusive GWK Cultural Park. As for culinary lover, GWK Cultural Park includes dining place called 'Jendela Bali' and some shopping center for tourists who wish to buy souvenirs.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, in Plaza Wisnu, which is the highest area in the GWK area, tourists can enjoy panoramic views of the southern hemisphere of Bali Island. There is a 22-meter high Lord Vishnu Statue made of copper. However, this place has a limited function since on this location there is a sacred temple named Parahyangan Somaka Giri.<sup>15</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

The meeting between I Nyoman Nuarta and Joop Ave gave birth the idea to realize the story of Garuda in the form of gigantic sculpture. He discussed the project with several figures such as Ida Bagus Oka and Ida Bagus Sudjana. Then, in 1994, they presented the plan to President Soeharto for approval. After President Soeharto approved the program, the construction began in 1997 at Ungasan Hill, although received some questions and critics from the scholar. The monetary crisis and politic situation that hit Indonesia in early 2000 postponed the construction of this mega project. The project resumed in 2013 after PT Alam Sutera Realty acquired it from PT Garuda Adimatra Indonesia owned by Nuarta.

In 2018, president Joko Widodo inaugurated the sculpture. The statue is considered as one from many great icons in the world, and become a pride of Indonesia. The figure of Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) in Ungasan Hill, South Kuta, Badung Regency is touted as a future tourism icon for Bali to attract domestic and foreign tourists.

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