



Hidden Potential of Arak Bali to be The World's Seventh Spirit; from religious purpose to negative investment list

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ABSTRACT

In a joint meeting between Governor and Bali Regional House of Representatives on 11 February 2019, Bali Governor Wayan Koster expressed his interest to promote arak as a trademark of Bali, a traditional Balinese spirit. Arak is a type of distilled alcoholic beverage, generally produced in Southeast Asia and South Asia countries. Each region has its distinctive method in selecting the most delicate raw material as primary ingredient, to its patients and meticulous preparations in producing the best liquor. Religious activities becomes chief reason the art of liquor distillation present in the island of God, especially Arak. It serves as tetabuhan in traditional and religious ceremonies, a recreational beverage for adults or even utilize to make herbal paste. Some traditional farmer use Wariga as a reference to determine the perfect day

to produce arak, therefore, the process becomes its distinctive feature. Realizing its hidden potential, Governor Koster expressed his interest in making Balinese Arak legal as a prospective industry to improve the communities economic welfare, by promoting it as a heritage-based product. Through departments in Provincial government, he prepares standardisation as well as legal basis to promote the liquor in tourism industry. However, the distilled spirit is classified as Alcohol type C on the law thus its distribution in full scale is strictly regulated by the law. Furthermore, Presidential Regulation which adds alcoholic beverages as negative investment list, become a high wall to climb before the customer could safely sip the product.

Keyword: Arak Bali, Distilled spirit, Legalisation

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BACKGROUND

In a joint meeting between Governor and Bali Regional House of Representatives on 11 February 2019, Bali Governor Wayan Koster expressed his interest to promote arak as a trademark of Bali, a traditional Balinese spirit. Moreover, some tourism expert also believe that Arak Bali has huge potential to be the world's seventh spirit. What is arak bali? And what make it deserve the attention?

WHAT IS ARAK BALI?

Arak is a type of distilled alcoholic beverage, generally produced in Southeast Asia and South Asia countries. Each region has its distinctive method in selecting the most delicate raw material as primary ingredient, to its patients and meticulous preparations in producing the best liquor. From the fermentation process of *Asian palmyra palm* or *Arenga pinnata* neera, coconut water, seeds such as white rice grain, brown rice or fruit, a substance called ethanol is obtained, giving the distilled spirit its alcoholic nature.

On the island of Bali, based on its raw materials, the folk is common to consume two types of arak. The first type, as well as the common one, is arak made from *Asian palmyra palm*, *Arenga pinnata*

neera, or coconut water. Then the second type is made from the fermentation process of brown rice or sticky rice grain. On its manufacturing process, the Balinese adds *lau*, a coconut husk fibre and *bayur* (*Pterospermum javanicum*) tree skin to the juice as a natural starter. A study reveals that the *lau* contains multi types of microorganisms that convert sugars into ethanol.¹

Furthermore, The distillation phase may be conducted to refine the solution. The final product is a clear liquor, with "between whiskey and rum" flavour. The liquor can be mixed with secret ingredient to distinct its characteristic, preserved in barrels, or repeatedly refined and filtered to obtain the desired colour and flavour.

Arak Bali has varying alcohol content, ranging from 15–45%.³ A study showed In multilevel distillation process, Balinese arak can even contains more than 80% ethanol substance. Due to its high alcohol content, It has been researched to develop as an alternative biofuel.⁴

The art of liquor distillation on the island of the gods is inseparable from religious activities. In 10th century, After Mpu Kuturan melts schools and Sects of Hindu teaching in Bali into *Shiva Sidhanta*, one of Bhairawa tantra sect custom is well preserved in the form of blood and liquor offering ritual. Liquors

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Figure 1. Liquors such as *tuak*, *arak* and *brem* are served as *tetabuhan* at traditional and religious ceremonies, which addresses to *Bhuta Kala*.²

such as *tuak*, *arak* and *brem* are served as *tetabuhan* at traditional and religious ceremonies, which addresses to *Bhuta Kala*. Meanwhile, in the art of Balinese medicine *Usadha*, Arak is used as a liquid agent of *boreh* to intensify the warmth sensation of ground herbal spices when being applied to the body of a sick. Besides, the distilled spirit sometimes is also being served as a recreational beverage in a banquet for adults.

THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS

Some traditional farmer, preserve the tradition of using traditional calendar system *Wariga* as a reference to determine the suitable time to produce arak, starting from tapping the tree, fermentation process, to its other small preparations. The process is what makes Balinese Arak becomes a unique product, due to its manufacturing process holds the sentimental value of ancient tradition.

The arak farmer begins their quest by tapping the palm tree or coconut to obtain the juice. The flowing neera juice is collected in a plastic barrel, then stored for another three to four days to increase its maturity. When the juice turns sour, the farmer adds coconut fibre husk and bayur leaf as a starting agents to start its fermentation process. Once the

farmer feels the fermentation process is sufficient, next the distillation process can be conducted. The farmer usually starts the process at 5:00 a.m., and it will take up to ten hours, until 3:00 p.m. to obtain the ready to drink spirit. Distilled arak may contains alcohol levels ranging from thirty to forty per cent. The alcohol grade is classified into three classes. For the first class, the alcohol content between 35 to 40 per cent, for the second class has 30 per cent alcohol content while the third class has 25 per cent alcohol content.

Eastern and northern area of Bali are well-known for their Arak home industries. However, due to its alcoholic content, the distribution of Arak in full scale is strictly regulated by the state. Arak Bali is classified as type C alcohol on the law. The distilled spirit is only legal to be distributed for religious ceremonies, albeit, when visiting the island of the gods, the potential of this distillation beverage has caught the tourism sector's attention.

THE GOVERNOR'S IDEA

Realising its hidden value, in a joint meeting between Governor and Bali Regional House of Representatives on 11 February 2019, Bali Governor Wayan Koster expressed his interest to promote arak as a trademark of Bali, a traditional Balinese spirit. He argued, Balinese Arak has a great potential to improve the communities economic welfare, by promoting it as a heritage-based product.⁶

“For this purpose, we must have a firm and robust regulation on a legal basis. After all these times, we import liquor products, why don't we start support and promote our local products as well?” Said Koster.

Arak Bali is a local genius, a noble heritage. The Governor of Bali shows his full commitment to complete the legalisation of Balinese spirit; thus, it may compete with foreign liquors, improve the community's welfare as well as to ensure no further prohibition to its market distribution. Koster said, in pledging for arak distribution policy, some requirements must be fulfilled. First and foremost, a legal basis must be established with supportive laboratory test from Food and drugs controller Agency (BPOM) as valid proof. When the product is ready to enter the market, it is necessary to build management of understanding (MoU) between the farmer or the palm tapper and the arak industry; thus the profit would mostly goes to the farmer. The idea runs well with The governor policy No. 99 of 2018 concerning local product enforcement. “In other words, to prioritise the home industries is a must!” Koster added. The Provincial Government of Bali also prepares social control regulation,



Figure 2. The arak farmer begins their quest by tapping the palm tree or coconut to obtain the juice.⁵



Figure 3. A product from liquor manufacture Dewi Sri using brand “Arak Bali”¹³

to ensure its distribution safety, including age restriction policy.

The similar statement also expressed by Chief of Indonesian Food and Beverage Executive Club (IFBEC), Ketut Dharmayasa on another occasion. He revealed that annually, six million tourists come to Bali, with approximate daily visit to reach 24,000 visitors. If every visitor decides to take arak as a gift, means 24.000 bottles of Arak will be sold daily. The potential to distribute arak also widely open to countless hotel in Bali as cocktail mix, local consumption as well as for ritual. By looking at the market opportunity, Bali's arak could dominate the retail as long as the spirit fulfil the quality standards. Dharmayasa expected the traditional liquor could be the next world seventh spirit. Today, the world-

renowned six type distilled spirits; Whiskey, Vodka, Rum, Gin, Brandy, and Tequila.⁷ He questioned, Why Bali, as the best tourists destination, does not have its mascot spirit?⁸

Meanwhile, the General director of Agro-Industry of the Ministry of Industry Abdul Rochim, suggests providing an agency to accommodate the farmers and the industry. It is necessary to oversee adequate supply and demand on the market, for the product continuity in the longer run.

The owner of a well-established alcohol industry Dewi Sri, Ida Bagus Rai Budarsa, commented that the discourse to legalise the arak Bali must be well prepared since it is strongly related to the image of the liquor product, including Bali as tourist destination. He believes individual farmer, or small group which produce home-scale arak, would better act as suppliers for large scale manufacturers for product availability, as well as to control the quality. He outlines the behaviour of mixing the spirit base with other raw materials, such as raw coconut water or even hazardous substance like Methanol often occurs in small industry level. Increasing demand for arak yet short in supply of the liquor is believed to be the chief reason why some irresponsible home industry tempted to mix the liquor. If such behaviour slips under control, it surely will be disastrous for the beverage industry and the image of Bali. In the past, such tragedies were taking place and took tolls of both local and foreigner life.^{9,10,11} Also, to promote the arak world widely, an exceptional quality product and frequent participation in overseas competitions would certainly help to raise the spirit reputation.¹²

NEGATIVE INVESTMENT LIST

Albeit the noble purpose to promote the small and local industry product, the promise of Bali Governor to legalise Balinese spirit faces a long-winding road. Presidential Regulation which adds alcoholic beverages as negative investment list, become a high wall to climb before the customer could safely sip the product. When the Presidential regulation has not been revised, means there is no single opportunity to do a mass production and distribution. Not only in Bali, North Sulawesi, Kupang and Maluku also pledge the revocation of alcohol from the list, because the local communities would like to elevate the level of their traditional beverages. Up to this point, The Coordinating Minister for the Economy together with several related ministries such as the Ministry of Industry, the Investment Coordinating Board, and the Ministry of Trade, are conducting studies to acquire adequate information. Therefore, it is expected that

the President would be willing to revise his policy.

The Governor's intention to legalise and promote Arak Bali is also being reviewed by the Bali Provincial National Narcotics Agency (BNNP). According to the BNNP Head of the Eradication division, AKBP Ketut Artha, He opens widely any input to measure both pros and cons when the product is launched in the market. He believed further review and meeting would be conducted by the National Narcotics Agency together with Bali House of representative before deciding the final decision.⁶

On the other hand, Head of trade and industrial department of Bali province, I Putu Astawa utilise the time to prepare the governor's plan entirely. "While waiting for the study to reach the President, we prepare the trading system and the production mechanism. Once the revision is published, then we are ready to execute the plan" Astawa said.

He prepares several plans; thus, the process of legalising Balinese spirit can be carried out and become a promises industry in Bali. He fully embraces the possibility of competition between Arak Bali and prominent alcohol industry. Bali's liquor product is undoubtedly competitive by promoting its affordable price and service quality improvement, he argued. The Balinese arak legalisation plan was not solely for the sake of the economy, but also to highlight the traditional cultural products based on Balinese traditional heritage.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Religious activities becomes chief reason the art of liquor distillation present in the island of God, especially Arak. It serves as tetabuhan in traditional and religious ceremonies, a recreational beverage for adults or even utilize to make herbal paste. Some traditional farmer use Wariga as a reference to determine the perfect day to produce arak, therefore, the process becomes its distinctive feature.

Realizing its hidden potential, Governor Koster expressed his interest in making Balinese Arak legal as a prospective industry to improve the communities economic welfare, by promoting it as a heritage-based product. Through departments in Provincial government, he prepares standardisation as well as legal basis to promote the liquor in tourism industry. However, the distilled spirit is classified as Alcohol type C on the law thus its distribution in full scale is strictly regulated by the law. Furthermore, Presidential Regulation which adds alcoholic beverages as negative investment list, become a high wall to climb before the customer could safely sip the product.

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