

AESTHETIC ASPECTS OF *PADUNG-PADUNG* AS PREFERENCE IN DESIGN DEVELOPMENT OF KARO TRADITIONAL JEWELRY

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ABSTRACT

Karo of North Sumatra as part of many tribes in Indonesia known has rich variety of arts and cultures. Among them is a unique jewelry named *padung- padung*. *Padung- padung* is a kind of earrings with admirably large size and weighing about 1.5-2 kg, represent woman status in Karo society in the past. Among other Karo's jewelry, *padung-padung* have a unique and simple ornament. Despite its simplicity, *padung-padung* contain of philosophy meaning that enrich the custom and tradition of Karo tribe. Today, *Padung-padung* has not even once ever been used, in fact many Karo's people especially their youngster not even recognize it. This research aims to acknowledge its future potent role especially from the aesthetic aspects as preference design development that raised its Karo culture. So that, the uniqueness and beauty of *padung-padung* could appear again and not just ended as part of historical library or hidden and forgotten beneath the present life of Karo civilization. Qualitative research will be conducted respectedly to describe the analyze result, accompanied with hermeneutics approach to describe the aesthetic aspects of *padung-padung* such as form (structures of shape), content (messages), and appearance. The art and culture of Karo is a representation of Karo high civilization as well as our national civilization, so we should responsibly nurture its well-existence by develop it into the next forms that is not only preservable but also sustainable.

Keywords: *padung-padung*, aesthetic aspects, design, sustainably

Suku Karo di Sumatera Utara sebagai bagian dari banyak suku di Indonesia memiliki khazanah seni dan budaya yang beragam. Salah satunya adalah perhiasan yang disebut padung-padung. Padung-padung adalah sejenis anting-anting yang memiliki ukuran cukup besar dengan berat berkisar 1.5-2 kg, digunakan perempuan Karo pada masa lalu sebagai perhiasan sekaligus simbol status. Diantara perhiasan-perhiasan lain yang dimiliki oleh suku Karo, padung-padung memiliki ragam hias yang unik dan sederhana. Namun, justru di balik kesederhanaannya itu, padung-padung sarat akan makna filosofis yang memperkaya adat dan tradisi suku Karo. Saat ini, padung-padung sama sekali tidak digunakan, bahkan banyak masyarakat Karo terutama generasi mudanya yang tidak mengenalnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali potensi padung-padung khususnya dari sisi estetikanya sebagai preferensi pengembangan desain perhiasan yang mengangkat budaya suku Karo. Dengan demikian, diharapkan keunikan dan keindahan padung-padung dapat muncul kembali dan tidak lagi hanya menjadi bagian sejarah yang tersembunyi dan terlupakan. Metode kualitatif digunakan untuk mendeskripsikan hasil analisis dengan pendekatan hermeneutika dalam menguraikan aspek-aspek estetika pada padung-padung yaitu: wujud (struktur bentuk), Isi (pesan), dan penampilan. Seni dan budaya Karo merupakan representasi tingginya peradaban Karo dan peradaban nasional kita, maka sudah menjadi tanggung jawab kita secara bersama-sama untuk merawat keberadaannya dengan mengembangkannya dalam wujud yang tidak saja lestari namun juga berkesinambungan.

Kata kunci: *padung-padung, aspek-aspek estetika, desain, berkesinambungan*

1. INTRODUCTION

Diverse community activities in each region affect the cultural value and customs created by the ancestors and predecessor. The philosophy of life is embodied and reflected in the custom, entwined with the belief system and religion hold. In regard with the values of belief, ornamental varieties elements on jewelry is one form of expression and acknowledgement toward the existence, majesty, and greatness of God, the creator of all beings in the world. Therefore, on a piece of jewelry, a deep understanding of life is implied. This background also reminds us into the realization that the variation of jewelry creation from time to time reflects the high sense of art and beauty owned by various tribes on this archipelago.

Karo tribe of North Sumatera, one of the ethnicities existed in Indonesia, inherits a rich art and culture with distinctive characteristics from their ancestor. One of the precious heritages is unique jewelry named *padung-padung*. It is a kind of large-sized earrings with weight ranges from 1.5-2 kg, worn by Karo women in the past as an adornment or social status symbol. Among other Karo jewelries, such as *sertali layang-layang*, *sertali rumah-rumah*, *gelang sarung*, *kudung-kudung*, and many others, *padung-padung* has the simplest decoration, yet beautiful. In addition to its uniqueness and beauty, as well as other ornaments from local cultural, *padung-padung* is allegedly full of philosophical meaning that enrich the customs and traditions of Karo tribe.

The potential and development of Karo cultural arts cannot be separated from how the tribe appreciates the art itself. Ironically, *padung-padung* as one of Karo's cultural heritages, in a glimpse, only becomes a part of the history, hidden and forgotten from Karo civilization today. The strong influence of foreign cultures due to the rapid advancement of technology is one of the reasons of values displacement of this local culture (Gustami, 2007).

Currently, *padung-padung* is no longer used. Moreover, the younger generation of Karo does not even acknowledge its existence. This is very unfortunate, for the

more this continues, it will affect on the dissolution of the common thread connecting the origin of our ancestors in the past with the present. This study aims to explore the potential of *padung-padung*, particularly in term of its aesthetics as a preference of jewelry design development elevating Karo culture. Thus, it is expected for the uniqueness and beauty of *padung-padung* to resurface, not only limited as part of the hidden and forgotten history of the past.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Literature Study

Literature study is conducted in order to collect materials related with the research problems and will be obtained from reference books, scientific journals, magazines, research, and other writings. This study will provide theories and foundation regarding *padung-padung*, aesthetic, design and jewelry. In addition to reference books and scientific writings, materials also generated from several sources on the Internet providing information regarding Karo culture, particularly *padung-padung*, which is increasingly rare.

2.2. Interview

The data collection is also conducted by interviewing sources with knowledge and understanding of Karo history and cultural arts, specifically with regard to the research object, *padung-padung*. The objective of the interview is also to collect information regarding the variety of other Karo jewelries.

2.3. Data Analysis Methodology

The data collected then analyzed using qualitative methodology, used to describe the analysis result with hermeneutic approach, emphasizing the aesthetic aspects of *padung-padung*, which covers three basic aspects; form (structural shape), content (message), and appearance (Djelantik, 1999).

In historical context, the cultural relic material from the past may no longer be elaborated by studying the context of original culture. Aside from the native

culture has no longer existed, also the timeframe separates the subject and object to be explained is too distant. Therefore the data analysis in this research uses hermeneutical approach.

The hermeneutical approach used is according to Paul Ricoeur's statement, which defines that there is no absolute truth in the interpretation of a discourse. Meaning or interpretation is always mediated by a series of symbols and text. Therefore, the task of hermeneutics is not looking for similarities between the transmitter of the message (text) and the interpreter, but to interpret the meaning and message as objective as possible in accordance with the existing text. The text itself is of course not limited to written evidence, visual images, or artifacts, but always related to the context. In the context there are various aspects that can support the integrity of meaning. The analysis should always move from the text, instead of other things outside the text. The most important thing of all is that the process of interpretation is always a dialogue between the text and the interpreter (Ricoeur, 2003).

3. ANALYSIS

As previously discussed above, this research aims to explore the potential of *padung-padung*, particularly in terms of aesthetic aspects as the preference of jewelry design development that elevates Karo culture. Hence, it is expected for the uniqueness and beauty of *padung-padung* to reemerge. In order to obtain the result of the analysis in accordance with the research objective, the discussion and analysis regarding aesthetics aspects of *padung-padung* is dissected as follows:

3.1. Form

The area of Karo Regency is located at an altitude of 120-1400m above sea level. The geographical location makes the region to experience cool climate and beautiful landscape, known as *Tanah Karo Simalem* (Perangin-angin, 2004). Within this region, there are several mountains, namely Mt. Sibayak, Mt. Sinabung, Mt. Barus, and many others, creating a fertile soil in this region. There

is also a lake in this region, Lake Wampu, precisely in the area of Langkat, flows from the upstream of Karo Regency, Lau Biang.

The cultural pattern of Karo community is formed by the beginning condition, in which agricultural sector as the main source of living mostly affected the culture itself. This agrarian culture has lasted very long and produced a tradition that later became a culture. The people proximity with the nature that gave them abundant agricultural products made the ancestors highly appreciated the natural surroundings, as well as managed everything that supports the ecosystem. One of the ancestor traditions can be seen during the first seed planting, where they would present offerings to the God of nature in order for an abundant harvest.

Various daily practices was then heavily affected by the agrarian culture, such as methods of how to work the farm, post-harvest events like *ngerik* (separating rice grains), *mahpah* (making crackers from freshly harvested rice), *guro-guro* (percussion entertainment from the young people), and other traditions like wedding ceremony, building a house, and many more (Perangin-angin, 2004). Their proximity with the nature becomes an inspiration in many sectors. One of them is the form of *padung-padung*, which is taken from an animal pattern of an insect called *tangga-tangga* or commonly known as millipede (*Chilognatha*).



Image 1. Millipede in coiled form inspires the shape of *padung-padung* (Sumber: http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaki_seribu, Oktober 2014)

Image 2. *Padung-padung* with shape similar with millipede (Sumber: Museum Pusaka Karo, Juli 2015)

The structure of *padung-padung* that is adopted from the shape of coiled millipede resembling a spiral form appears very simple compared to other jewellerys back then, that are rich in ornament and decoration. Karo tribe itself has various types of ornaments originated from arts of carving and has been applied to some forms of arts and objects. Natural environment, human being, animal, and plants influence and encourage the creation of those ornamental forms. Geometrical shape of *padung-padung* is the implementation of one of Karo ornaments, *panai*, which serves as bad omen repellent, cast out evil, and *gereken-gereken* (seeing premonition). The variety of Karo ornaments can be seen in the image below.



Image 3.

Arts of carving that become significant ornaments of Karo tribe and have been applied to objects; (1) (1). *Suki-suki* painting, (2). *Bulung binara* painting, (3). *Desa siwaluh*, (4). *Tumpak salah silima-lima*, (5). *Bindu matoguh*, (6) and (7). *Bindu matagah*, (8). *Panai*, (9). *Tapak salah sipitu-pitu*, (10). *Pantil manggis*, (11). *Pengeret-eret*, (12). *Tapak raja Sulaiman*
(Source: Mengenal Lebih Dekat Budaya Karo, Juli 2014)

The simple form with no excessive ornaments and details actually makes *padung-padung* a unique jewelry. The material characteristic being used is also distinctive. *Padung-padung* simple form becomes the main attraction among other jewellerys, not only when the jewelry was still used, but also until today when its shape can only recognized through a visual format of photographs documentary by a Dutch photographer, exhibited in many museums abroad. The beauty of *padung-padung* is actually emanating from its simplicity. However, based on the data collection from foreign books, it was found that there are *padung-padung* with ornaments in the center part. The ornament was specially made by order from the owner.

3.2. Weight

Weight here is not referred to the literal mass of *padung-padung*, but the meaning behind that can be felt and experienced. Behind its simple physical form (tangible), *padung-padung* stores a deep symbolical meaning. Not only stands as a status symbol, also philosophical values on how human being perceive life; expression of gratitude of Karo people toward the nature that has given them a decent life, message of love from a father to his daughter, and marriage life between husband and wife.

The principal social order of Karo community is a system known as *merga silima*. *Merga* is a unique and the most integral part of Karo people identity. A person is a Karo when he owns *marga/beru* from one of the five clans (*merga silima*), namely Karo-karo, Ginting, Tarigan, Sembiring, and Peranginangin (Peranginangin, 2004). In further development, the clan serves as an instrument to determine the kinship between Karo people. *Marga* is given to the descendants based on the father's *marga* (surname), whereas for daughters, it is called *boru*. Since *marga* is only given for the sons, then Karo community is categorized as patrilineal, which means inherited descendants is from the father's line. The existence of patrilineal system in Karo custom indirectly positions the importance of a son in a family as a successor.

A father gives *padung-padung* to her daughter on her wedding day to indicate her new marital status (Brinkgreve & Stuart-Fox, 2013:55). Based on this, we can conclude that although Karo society still adheres with patrilineal system of lineage, which means a son is the successor of the family *marga*, a daughter is still considered imperative. Fatherly love is pure regardless the children gender, even though until today in Karo tradition, sons still receive several privileges compared with daughters.

The spiral shape contains diverse meanings. If summarized, the symbolical meaning of a spiral illustrates the power of sun and moon, air, water, thunder and

lightning, vortex, and creativity. In the contrary, spiral also illustrates the rise and fall of the sun, tidal moon, growing up and death, depreciation, entanglement and openings, birth and death (Cooper, 1987). Therefore, if examined further, the meaning behind the presenting of *padung-padung* is for the father indirectly advising the daughter to be wise in dealing with various problems and issues in the marriage life.

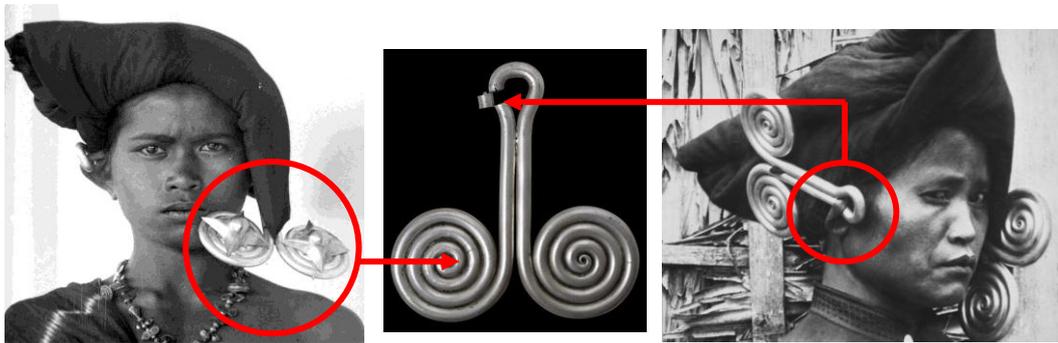


Image 4. *Padung-padung* with ornament in the center. The tip is inserted to the left ear hole in downward position, while on the right ear, it is worn in upward position. To reduce burden, the headdress is inserted in the other part of the jewellery (Source: <http://Karsiadi.blogspot.co.id>, November 2014)

Image 5. Other type of *padung-padung* worn by mature Karo woman. The jewellery is worn on the right and left ear (Source: <http://Karsiadi.blogspot.co.id>, November 2014)

Another perspective states that *padung-padung* is presented as a gift from the family of the groom to the bride (Rodgers, 1988). The way of wearing *padung-padung* is different between the right ear and the left ear, which is on the right ear it is worn facing the rear with slightly elevated position, whereas on the left side it is worn facing forward with a lower position. This contains an implicit meaning symbolizing marriage life that is not always smooth. There will be a condition of happiness (symbolized with *padung-padung* facing up) and sadness (symbolized with *padung-padung* facing down). Thus, in a marriage life, husband and wife must be mutually supportive with each other (Rodgers, 1988).

Status symbol is defined as the ownership of which is considered as a proof of social position, wealth, prestige of a person. Status symbol can also be interpreted as social position of a person based on his social and economic status (Cherrington, 1994). *Padung-padung* is a status symbol for those who wear it, because only woman from family with an important role in the society who can have it. Being viewed from the material used in making *padung-padung*, which are gold copper type and silver, it is shown that this jewelry value is quite high. Therefore, we can conclude that the woman who owns this jewelry is not only from the family of society leader and custom leader, but also a wealthy family. In addition, facts from photographs observation and varied sizes of *padung-padung* (small, medium, small) show that it is not only worn by adult, but including children and adolescents.

3.3. Appearance

In addition to wearing *padung-padung*, Karo women usually wear other jewellerys, such as *sarung* bracelet, *sertali layang-layang kitik*, *padung curu-curu*, cincin *pinta-pinta*, and many more. The factors that make *padung-padung* stands out are the large size for earrings, which is 7.5cm, 13cm, and 15.5cm, and its weight of 1.5kg-2kg. In addition to its size and weight, the way of wearing it is unusual, which is attached to the headdress. Its simple form also makes this jewelry unique and beautiful. For its uniqueness, Karo women who wear *padung-padung* at that time were capable to display the exotic indigenous culture of Karo, thus being chosen to be the books cover published abroad.

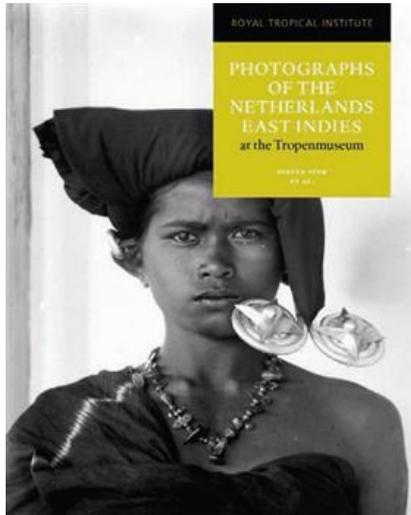


Image 6. Karo woman wears *padung-padung* with star ornament as the cover of book *Photograph of The Netherlands East Indies* (Source: www.amazon.com, Oktober 2015)

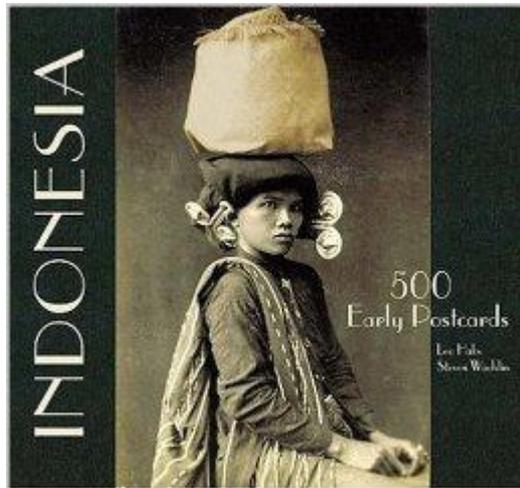


Image 7. Karo woman sits while wearing *padung-padung* and headdress. On top of the headdress is placed *sumpit nakan*, which is a container to carry goods (rice and others) (Source: www.amazon.com, 03 Oktober 2015)

Besides a simple form of spiral in *padung-padung*, also being found *padung-padung* with ornament on top. This occurs because the customer demands to have a different design for *padung-padung* she will be wearing and usually the customer also provides the raw material (Sibeth, 1991). The material used to make *padung-padung* is gold copper type and silver, originated from coins from Spain, Mexico, and Japan, which are commonly found back in 19th to 20th century (Sibeth, 1991). That happens due to good quality of silver in the coins to be melted into jewelry.



Image 6, 7, 8. The material is made of silver plated with gold or copper (Img 6) or silver without gilt (Img 7, 8) weigh 1.5-2kg, a length of 15.5cm, using star shape as ornament (img 6), some use granulation technique on the ornaments. (Source: Power and Gold: Jewelry from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines from the Collection of the Barbier - Mueller Museum in Geneva, 1988)

The beauty of *padung-padung* with or without ornaments cannot be separated from the abilities and skills of the *pande besi* (blacksmith) in processing metals into jewellery and other disposable items. There are several techniques of making objects from metal, such as casting and forging. Sometimes both of the techniques are used to produce certain items. Several techniques decorating metal that have been done since a long time ago are *menorah*, pressing, incrustation (coating), granulation (metal granules technique), and filigree or filigree (braided silver and gold in a thread form)

Conservation does not mean should not be developed. In this case, development can be done by revitalization (regeneration, recreation, reinterpretation), however in developing a cultural work of arts should be endeavoured not to eliminate or change the 'powerful attributes' or existing characteristics, for those attributes are the inherent identity of the object (Supanggih, 2008). In relation to jewelry design development with local culture values of Karo as a preference, *padung-pdaung* shape has the potential to be extracted and applied in modern jewellery. Jewelry is a work of art that is designed to be used. In a piece of jewelry, the primacy of the functions is not the ultimate attention, since we all know that a ring is designed to be used comfortably on the finger, earring on the ear, necklace on the neck, and so on. The aesthetic factors and effectiveness of the use of ornament design are matters that must be taken into consideration (Morton, 1970:6).

If we notice the way of wearing *padung-padung* in the past, it was certainly far from comfort. The weight reaches 2kg and then inserted into the ear hole and attached to the headdress of the wearer will make the head overburdened. To be applied on modern jewelry with more practical approach, this of course will not meet the criteria. Selection of material must also be taken into consideration, due to usage of solid metal will make the jewelry becomes heavy. Other alternative materials can be selected from natural materials, like rattan or other lightweight metals.

The simplicity in *padung-padung* shape is not solely because the ease in organizing elements, but it was related to the fundamental disposition of natural phenomenon with equal and similar form. The resemblance is due to the nature of imitation or mimesis character done by human toward natural phenomenon, in this case is the form of millipede insect as an expression of Karo people proximity to the nature. The curved shape of spiral is a fundamental abstraction of natural phenomenon catered to specific symbolical needs or as a form of representation as discussed previously. The simplicity of shape is instead becomes the excellence of *padung-padung* to be implemented as an aesthetic element that is applicable in modern jewelry today and the basis of the conservation and development of cultural products based on local indigenous.

4. CONCLUSION

Over time, *padung-padung* existence today only serves as an unknown history for the public and even Karo young generations. Meanwhile, *padung-padung* with all its uniqueness has gained recognition from other nations in the world, characterized by several discussions of *padung-padung* in various international cultural forums. This contradiction occurred is supposed to be a warning for us not to be complacent in preserving the rich cultural heritage that we own.

Based on the discussion above, in term of aesthetics, it is clear that a simple tangible form on *padung-padung* has a uniqueness that is not owned by other tribes in Indonesia, perhaps even the world. Therefore, aesthetically, *padung-padung* shape can become a preference of jewelry design development with Karo cultural values. Example of concrete efforts is the exploration of potential on the jewelry and application to the more modern jewelry that is tailored according to the taste of the contemporary culture of public nowadays. Several adjustments in size, material, additional ornaments, and other factors, may make *padung-padung* as interesting alternative aesthetic elements to be developed. Similarly, the implicit meaning contained in *padung-padung* can be a learning experience for today generation in addressing life filled with challenges and obstacles. This is

one way of preserving *padung-padung*. Thus, its existence will be maintained in a sustainable form.

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