

## Initiating Artifact Design as Cultural Product Development in Indonesia

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Indonesia –the country with a variety of ethnics and cultural resources— needs an integrated treatment in the field of regional planning. From a wide range of ongoing endeavors in regional planning in some communities in Indonesia, this paper focuses on the significance of artifact design development. Artifact design means an in-dept study on functional objects representing the culture of the community. It is important to promote this subject to the nation stakeholders, specifically for the developing of communities which still in crucial problems in formulating their cultural identity. The problems happened since the interference of global market ideology has conditioned the activities of artifact making in mostly communities to be profit-oriented without bringing cultural responsibility up to surface as the prior consideration for the nation building.

To cope with the problem, the author has initiated to socializing artifact design to be using as an improvement program for the community development as well as an academic subject in the near future. As first step, it is imperative to straightening up the understanding about the “artifact” in relating to what is a good design in the context of community development. In this context, good design of the artifact is an indigenous functional object based from the cultural resources of the community. The cultural resources is a range from their own peculiarity of natural resources, hereditary wisdom in harmony to nature, skills, social values and daily purposes which all could be using as conceptual starting point in artifact development activities. Indonesia has a rich of classic artifacts ranging from *batik* and *tenun* (kinds of traditional textile), *angklung* (bamboo music instrument), *pincuk* (wrapping leaves) to various kinds of seating furniture which all of them need to be more modifying in its purpose and quality.

The second step is to introducing the objectives why the artifact design activities should be implementing. There are at least four stages of it: (a) stimulating the spirit of industrious in the community, (b) maintaining communal wisdom and hereditary skills, (c) integrating the total productivity in the community, and (d) developing symbiotic function of artifact design. As experienced, this program could be successfully adopting by the people through design workshop and trilateral cooperation program named “Join Artifact Development” involving the university, government, and the community stakeholders. This artifact design program has conducted in some communities in Indonesia such as in industrial communities of West Java, West Sumatra, and so on. All programs have different premises like to uplifting the awareness of eco-design and sustainable design for the children in industrial community, conducting artifact design activities in rural areas, good artifact design awarding, and so on.

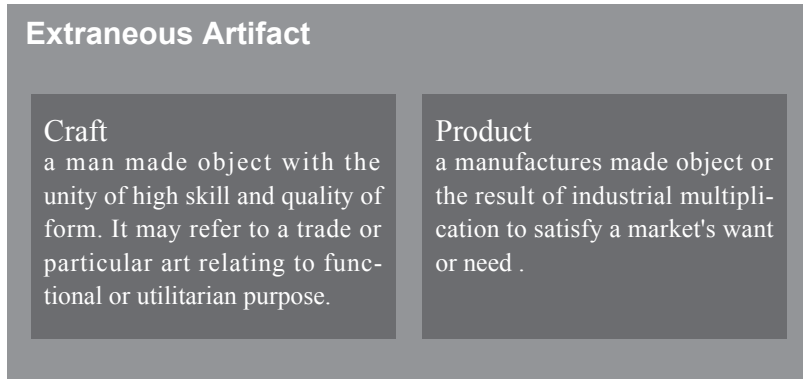
### 1. THE DISTINCTION OF CRAFT, PRODUCT, AND ARTIFACT

If we mention the three keywords in design field –product, craft, and artifact-- even though they are in the same category as functional object, what we have in mind is that they are different in nuance. The difference lays on reason

why the objects to be made. We used to mention “product” if the premise of the object we talk about is relating to some requisites in industrial context: what kind of technology used, what manufacture process implicated in multiplying the object, and how to manage it the various stages of commercialization. What is all about with the approach needed in designing product is mostly the technological approach.

## Artifact

All of man-made objects representing the culture of its creator and users. This paper divides it into indigenous (object made 'from-by-and for' the community) and extraneous artifact (to be made 'for' the commercial interest).



**Figure 1:** The distinction of artifact, craft, and product.

Craft also implies technological process but is slightly different in its nuance. A craft is a synthesis of high skill and high quality of form or practical arts. It may refer to a trade or particular art. We say "craft" to indicate the value of skill and uniqueness rather than the efficiency in its technological process. It also relates to the hand made object with the use of natural material. Despite craft derived from the tradition of rural people in artifact making, its visual uniqueness makes crafts potential to be commercial commodity as well as it targeting in the mass-products. Recently, we found so many local industries of crafts merely to cope with market demand, no longer to cope with the locals' cultural demand. This has passed over the line of category when craft has been no more as an artifact. The ancient seating of Javanese noble, for example, is no more as an artifact when it was multiplying for decoration element of the modern interior. That seating tool has lost its utilitarian value.

In human kind history, "artifact" preceded both crafts and industrial product. It is all of the human made-object as long as it is to cope with the needs of their daily life. The utilitarian value is the most priority in the concept of artifact. People make objects based on their basic needs for eating, praying, sitting, dressing, and moving to another place in maintaining their culture, specifically in raising the quality of their life and harmonizing their life with the nature. Artifact object usually made by certain community and made from the potential resources of their environment, for the use of the community itself. Basketry village makes various kinds of basket it is because of their needs to utilizing the abundance of bamboo in their surrounding. The village women also make and use bamboo basketry to

cope with their need of light carrier tool, and so on. From this perspective, we could assume artifact has different meaning from commodity. Commodity is the object made by locals but for the sake of financial profit and market demand. Crafts and products would be no longer as artifact it is because of their manufacturing process and commercial targets.

Artifact is rather conceptual than craft which emphasizes on visual and technical aspect. It also means any object made or modified by a human culture, and later recovered by a historical and an archaeological endeavor.

A numerous kinds of wisdom --conceptual wisdom-- could be obtained trough the use of artifact. For instance, aside from its conformity as seating tools and the spatial standard of Japanese living, the use of *tatami* teaches us about the significant of rice-straw material used as human



**Figure 2:** *Batik* -the traditional textile- is the most quintessentially Indonesian artifact. It practiced by the females as a form of therapeutic drawing directly on the cloth used as casual and formal fashion in Javanese ethnics.

tools for living. In Indonesia, we could *batik* –a Javanese traditional ornamented textile-- as the representative of Indonesian artifact. The wisdom of this artifact does not lie with the beauty of its ornamentation, but in the appreciation of women works. Mostly batik makers are women. Batik is the work of their keenly devotion to their productivity and their expression of beauty within their life. Some psychologists say that batik making could become a kind of therapy in understanding and controlling the rhyme of life.

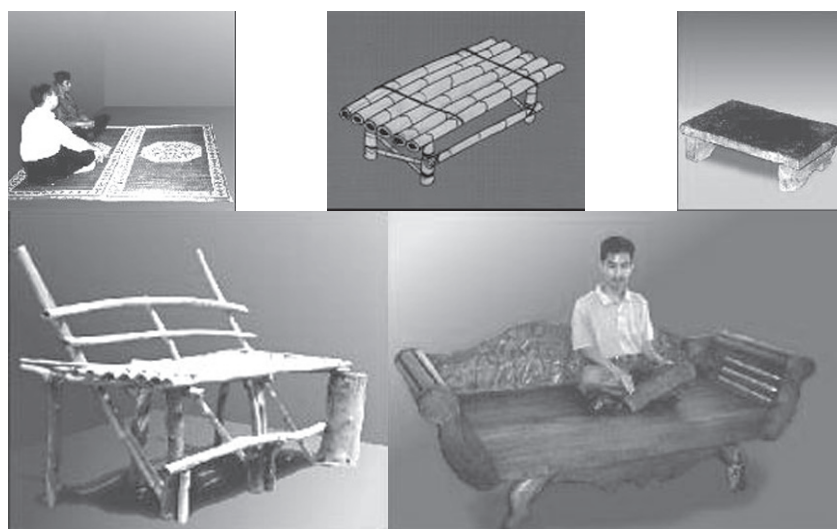
Artifact design then could be defined a creative planning and making of artifact, specifically in creating of its utilitarian value, based on the indigenous culture and hereditary wisdom of the community. This description of “artifact design” closes to the “*monozukuri*” in Japanese term. Actually, the author more divides the semantic type of artifact into two categories, which are: (1) indigenous artifact and (2) extraneous artifact. “Indigenous artifact” means a cultural based object made ‘from-by-and for’ the community, meanwhile “extraneous artifact” is a cultural based object made ‘from and by’ their own but ‘for’ the commercial interest. The word “artifact” in this paper actually refers to the meaning of “indigenous artifact”.

## 2. ARTIFACT OF INDONESIA

In Indonesia, artifact design is supposed to be implementing as a program for design education and community

development, either formal academic curricula or informal activity of the community. It is imperative to implementing it considering that Indonesia has a rich of cultural ethnics and natural resources. It is convincing that if artifact design has implemented successfully in Indonesia, the significant of artifact design could be proving as well as its great contribution gained in the form various findings from various related research. Unfortunately, in the practical condition of development country like Indonesia, to initiate artifact design would be facing the problem of misperception about material culture. At least, there are two problems of misperception might be existed: first is the misperception that good functional object is always something that priors to be good in market, second the tradition in developing of design is always starting from formal and visual aspect, not the conceptual and essential.

It frequently occurred in the public and governmental endeavors in promoting artifact and indigenous potency of regional culture. The essential meaning of artifact remains vague for them and then artifact always excludes from the agenda of promotion. In the culture of sitting in Javanese people for instance, the local tradition has showed us that they have varying sitting postures and seating tools in their daily life in pre-modern period. The varying seating tools, aside from chairs, are ranging from low-leg stool, mats to the traditional long bench made from bamboo. Everybody knows that each is to support sitting, but we could find some



**Figure 3:** Long bench, low leg stool, mat are representative and indigenous seating tools but getting less developed comparing to the styles of chair.

conceptual 'wisdom' behind the object aside from its physical function. Low-leg stool even it used in informal working situation with whatever it is the appearance, is a useful tool in the rural neighborhood situation. It is very useful tool for gathering and doing some social works in the floor setting. It also provides floor style sitting freely, from cross leg to stretch leg kinds of posture. It is because the change in neighborhood pattern in the recent urban lifestyle the tradition of neighbor gathering to working has been hardly continuing which makes low leg stool very rarely to use and has no commercial value. That is the reason why the design of low leg stool --unlike the varying styles of chairs-- has no interest to develop anymore in modern furniture. It also happened in the case of bamboo long bench. In pre-modern period (-1940s) in Java, bamboo long bench was called a 'day and night' tool. The nature of bamboo material, specifically black bamboo or locals say "pockmarked bamboo" is the sun heat absorber. People used to have it outside from the dwelling to be drying in the sun and public furniture as well, but at night, people have it inside the dwelling as a 'warm bench' and the comfort stool for family gathering. The wisdom concept of locals' artifacts like bamboo bench and low leg stool now is fading away along the time people keep using modern chairs for their daily seating tool.

The conceptual wisdom behind local artifact would be potentially fruitful if the people awareness to developing it had been getting sufficient. The conceptual wisdom of local artifact is not only the urge to living in harmony with nature and the surrounding neighbor, but also stimulating us to aware about human health and productivity. In designing artifact, people should consider the ecosystem of the environment, the wisdom of community in the form of mythology and social values, before they have decided to make the artifact. They need motivation, consistency and skill to make something useful for themselves with the use of indigenous material resources and techniques. They should also be open mind if their design would keep revised by another people time after time to find its optimum performance, specifically in its utilitarian value. Therefore, the design intellectuals in countries with a rich of cultural diversity like Indonesia and another Asian countries should take this artifact design as an important issue up to surface and cooperate each other in initiating the action of artifact design to collect, protect and developing it to be more suitable with

global modern lifestyle.

### 3. FOUR MAIN OBJECTIVES IN PROMOTING ARTIFACT DESIGN

In initiating artifact design in Indonesia, the author always introduces the design intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and related sections of government about the reasons why the artifact design is necessary, and what the cultural benefit gained from the implication. There are four issues in initiating artifact design, which are: (1) stimulating the spirit of industrious; (2) maintaining tradition, wisdom, and hereditary skill; (3) integrating the community to the total system of production; and (4) developing symbiotic function of the artifact.

#### 3.1 Stimulating the spirit of industrious

Artifact design emphasizes the activity of evaluation, generating idea, planning and making utilitarian objects empirically. The designer is an entity of academician, designer, planner, maker and all the stakeholders of the community. As an entity, the interchange of knowledge, information, and skill is imperative to produce systemic solution or new innovative artifacts. Therefore, the university on design should increase the use of field survey method in designing of the real problem of community. Field survey could appear in two folds, the student learning more about the locals' sensitivity, skills, and social-mythological values related to the problem studied. In the other side, the local stakeholders, users, and related institution get new information and perspectives in coping with their real problem. The interchange of knowledge and skill between them can upgrade the quality of community living. Both the students and the community could stimulate themselves to produce something useful, to be productive, and to be industrious.

Stimulating the spirit of industrious can formalize through the training program or design workshop. It would more affect to the community if the program targeting to the children with some objectives such as uplifting their awareness of natural harmony, the application of technology to cope with the real problem of their daily life and the uplifting their skill in the training of object making. As experienced, the children living in industrial community should be rescued by training them in artifact making for





**Figure 4:** Artifact design training for the children in the industrial community at Cibaduyut area of West Java. It had two main purposes: (a) to motivate the children to be industrious; (2) to realize about the significance of sustainable design, and (3) to safe them from the dangerous effect of chemical glue and hazardous works in the footwear industry.

their daily purpose as well as introducing them on the issue of occupational safety and health in working area. Every year from 2001 to 2003, the author and team conducted the design workshop in artifact development for the children of footwear industry at Cibaduyut area, West Java. The training is valuable considering that the children are helping their parents in making shoes but mostly in hazardous condition of workshop. They used to work without creativity, just do what they have to do as their parents order to. Therefore, the main purpose of the program is to making them realize about the natural harmony, and training them to generating the industrial leather waste into varying kinds of functional object. Several design lecturers, design professionals and related governmental person working guiding the children to be more sensitive in recycling, reusing, and reutilizing leather waste. As the resulted exercise, their creations were very inspiring as the waste leather surprisingly available to plaiting, layering, entwining or combining them into vari-

ous purposes. Principally, the training prepares them to be more creative and industrious in facing their future.

### 3.2 Maintaining hereditary wisdom and skill

Every ethnic, community, villagers, specifically traditional community has its peculiar worldviews spreads as mythological texts and conceptual wisdom hidden in the way of its people living and its artifact. The problem always occurred if there is no more motivation to maintain the hereditary tradition and skill in artifact because of the cultural friction from external influence. To re-motivating them by theoretical training or education for uplifting the awareness is so often not sufficient otherwise practical workshop on design and join artifact design involving craftsmen, designers, and all of the stakeholders in the community. The program namely “Join Artifact Development” is imperative to be initiating. It consists of workshop activities by inviting certain craftsmen to be lecturers at the university, and in the con-



**Figure 5:** Situation of artifact design training in Minang ethnic of West Sumatra. Caused by the matriarchal society, the local crafts people tend to come up with the ideas based on mother activities in the family such as cooking appliances, tableware and floral ornamentation.

trary the university intellectuals have also visit and spend some times with the community to grasping the indigenous values of them as well as anthropologist doing for research.

In conducting the Join Artifact Development program at certain community, it is necessary at first to collect from them the myths around the local customs and tradition. These myths range from cosmological myths to the fairy tales about nature and etiquette. They invited to put down the prevailed tales in the form of visual diagram, description, and symbols. These visual data then could perform as a symbolic classification system and based on this, the locals with design intellectuals furthermore could be able to come up with some innovative ideas to developing more into new kinds of artifact and communal activity. The author found the interesting finding when conducted this program in Minang ethnic of West Sumatra. This ethnic characterized as matriarchal society. It is because of that the women are more prominent than men in a pattern of their inheritance, the visual symbolic prevailed in this ethnic mostly drawn into things female interests such as floral figures, motherly natures, string-like icons, and others. What they have in mind in making simple thing for their daily purpose is always mother-centered things like cooking appliances, tableware, clothing, and others.

### 3.3 Integrating the community to the total system of production

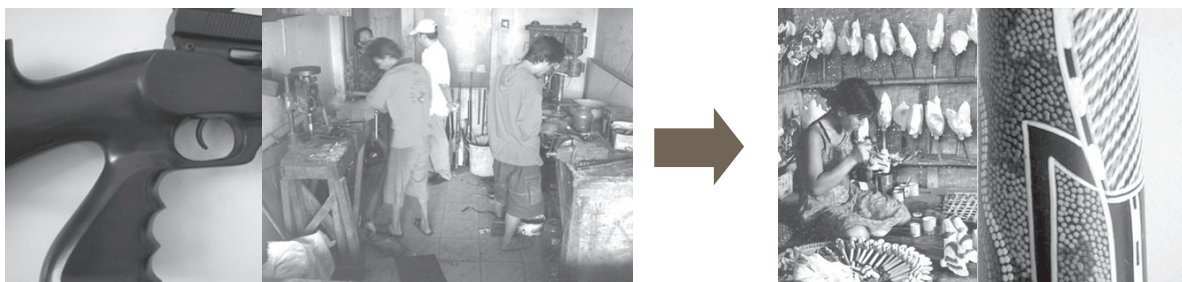
We found that the community has its own characteristics in producing something meaningful, either it is as certain industrial community or as an agricultural community. For most of the community member, producing something useful either an artifact or another functional things, is part of their existence among all

members of the community. Casually in making artifact they used to relying so much in the natural resources and skill. The problems have occurred when the climatic obstruction sometimes caused difficulty in supplement of raw materials. The problems also happened when what they used to make is kind of fashionable craft but getting lost its marketable value. Therefore is inevitable to implement regional planning and artifact design in this case. These productive communities should have anticipation plans by clustering their production and doing networking among others. It is also conducting with the diversification approach on designing their resulted crafts to be surviving in the target market.

As experienced in several industrial communities in West Java, the author with the provincial government have reorganized the community producing the air rifle gun at Cipacing area. Previously this community had hereditary talents in wood and metal carving, but it because of their working nature relying on job-order pattern, they have occupied in making of air rifle gun for domestic and export demands. The author proposed idea that this community urgently needs a diversification of their crafts. It perhaps the female workers are always not involved in making air rifle gun which identical to male interest. Then the new ideas of artifact like toys and music instruments made of wood and metal combination have been proposing to shift their tradition of artifact making. This proposal is proving beneficial for the community because the female worker could juxtapose themselves to the male workers again as industrious agent of the community.

### 3.4 Developing symbiotic function of the artifact

Symbiotic function in this term indicates the mutual benefi-



**Figure 6:** The community at Cipacing West Java used to fulfilling the order to make air rifle gun now on is in treatment to shifting their routine to the making of ornamented musical instrument as to the females could involve to the communal productivity.



**Figure 7:** The utilization of coconut tree, from its leaves to its shell, could make it available for varying purposes and to upright the symbiotic activities in the community.

cial relationship between one activity and another activity in the whole process of artifact making. What is good artifact is if it sustains the harmony of the living ecosystem if it taken from the nature it should always back to the nature. It also means any inter-independency cyclical process ranging from supplying of raw material, artifact making, the usage of artifact and its waste utilizing to support the supplying of raw material and so on.

In many communities in Asian countries, the representation of symbiotic pattern is that the cultivation of rice straw among agricultural communities. Rice straw material is potentially raw material for varying purposes such as kinds of basket, mat, and the others before it would re-utilize as land fertilizer. In Indonesia, coconut trees have potentiality to be reutilizing into several purposes as well as rice straw, ranging from its leaf, shell, stem to its root. The coconut its leaf is very popular used as food wrapping it is because of the preserving nature it has, and its shell is often used as spoon or tableware set in representing the traditional imageries, and so on. Aside from coconut, the tropical resources provides also another potential raw materials to be utilizing as recycle-able artifact such as water hyacinth, *pandanus* leaves, rattan, and another.

In building the symbiotic pattern in artifact making of the community, the recycling process is considering significant. Recycling process is supposed to be implementing in material used in modern urban life style like aluminum, glass, and kinds of waste plastic. From the research of the author's student, it has been obtaining that the combination of recycled aluminum and fragmented bottle glass can be utilizing into various simple but useful objects such as stationery and fashion accessories. The excellent value is not on its surprising surface or physical appearance of the artifact but the inspiration and great opportunity it offered for small medium

enterprises to more developing its utilization.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In Indonesia, initiating the artifact design and regional development as the improvement program for the communal quality of life is still great challenging, specifically in the post tsunami disaster areas such as Aceh at northern part of Sumatra, and some coastal areas at Java. But the mostly problems we have in its implementation is all about uncompromising condition between the multi-interests of the government, private supporting companies, intellectuals and the other stakeholders of the community. That is why the initiation in artifact design has been doing 'safely' if it has been doing in the context of research and academic way of implementation.

It is frequently hard to convince people on the significance of artifact design and it needs constantly socializing that as a term, the artifact design is not similar to introducing activities about a new discipline or new activity for the people. Rather, it is the effort to re-digging up the cultural resources of the community. As we know, cultural resources is broadly ranging from the abundance of natural material, the peculiar skill and processing, the ritual custom, the communal tradition in living with harmony to their environment, their indigenous artifact (functional objects for daily purposes), the extraneous artifact (crafts and products produced by the community for commercial purpose) to the prevailed myths and symbols. These are referential matters in developing of new artifact design in particular community. Unfortunately, the problem we are always facing in recent global development is that these cultural resources always be exploiting for the capital economic purposes. The conceptual wisdom on natural harmony is getting shifting

with the rational parameter of modern education system. Even the teaching of hereditary skills of traditional community has been marginalizing in modern basic schools. It just taught as optional course. Introduction about how to make and appreciate simple things from ceramics, recycled paper, wood and another is no longer the compulsory subject for our children. For mostly the modern people artifact always understood as ancient objects or human made object in archeological interest, not in modern interest. This is truly misperception and false understanding because the artifact should be renewing and creating from time to time as long as we are still improving the quality of our life. Artifact poses dynamic entity from generation to generation, not only exists in the past time.

These phenomena of misperception and false direction of material culture still happened to us and at least motivated us that artifact design is imperative to humanize our surrounding people and to harmonize them to the environment.

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