

INTERSECTION CULTURAL VALUE, NATIONALISM, AND COMMODIFICATION BEHIND THE GARUDA CHAIR AS JEPARA'S SIGNATURE INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The aims of the research were to identify the cultural value and nationalism behind the Garuda chair and to compare it with another style that had more sellable value as commodities. The research used a qualitative descriptive methodology using literature, observation, site visit, and interview data to be analyzed. In conclusion, the Garuda chair has a potential to become an Indonesian commodity in the furniture market and international community by promoting the cultural value behind it and the effectiveness of material using for the chair.

Keywords: *cultural value, nationalism, commodification, Garuda chair, Jepara furniture industry*

INTRODUCTION

Jepara is known as a city of wood carving and crafts. As center of the carved wooden furniture industry, Jepara produces variants of furniture, especially chairs. One of them is called the Garuda chair, which explores the formation of the mythological bird of the national symbol of Indonesia, Garuda. Its center of production is located in Dongos village. But, some of the natives and furniture producers have no idea about in and out of Garuda chair. It is such a pity, knowing that Garuda chair is originated from Jepara. The chair using a symbol of nationalism and an icon of production in Jepara's cultural value. Ihsan and Sachari (2015) have reasoned that it is necessary to build a system that mixing the needs of the craftsmen of new designs and selling these new products in a more systematic way using the catalyst institution. As a business institution, the catalyst institution has the purpose of supporting the organization to develop craftsmen's communities.

Furniture producers in Jepara are generally the change takers, rather than the change-makers. Most of Jepara's small-scale entrepreneurs have no sufficient business management skills, so the profit

distribution is inefficient and inequitable (Larasatie, 2018), especially craftsmen in Dongos who produce Garuda chair and becomes a commodity for making economic value. Rosadi (2016) has researched carving production in Jepara which commodification applies to the development of classic chair designs that depend on the craftsmanship of the local people crafted as mass products. The trend factor makes commodification of chair furniture through aspects of design science, among others, style, theme, shape, size, material, texture, color, and ornament. There is an intersection between cultural value, nationalism, and commodification. This research is purposed to introduce people about Garuda chair further, how it is first designed, and how it is now in the Indonesian furniture market. Moreover, this research, hopefully, can be a promotion media to help the crafters and the producers to increase their selling.

METHODS

The research applied a qualitative descriptive method. In order to gather data and information, the researchers do several techniques, such as site

observation to several Garuda chair's workshops in Jepara, interview with some informants who are the producer themselves, and also observe some literature data from online and offline writings. After collecting the data, the researchers make analysis to draw results and conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Furniture making skills have been possessed by Jepara people for centuries, since the days of Queen Shima (7th century), Queen Kalinyamat (16th century), and R.A. Kartini (19th century). Their ancestors have passed down the skills for generations in a unique system of inheriting skills and learning processes (Irawati & Purnomo, 2012). There are a few historical records about Jepara's carving. It is told that Jepara's wood carving is growing rapidly at its finest during the reign of Majapahit. Jepara carvings have traces during the reign of Queen Kalinyamat (1521-1546) in 1549. The queen has a daughter named Retno Kencono who plays a significant role in the development of carving in Jepara (Nangoy & Sofiana, 2013). She has succeeded in making Jepara one of the capital cities and the main port of Java's north coast. This has an impact on the rapid development of the social, economy, religion, art, and culture of Jepara. But, after the fall of the Majapahit's reign and the entry of Islamic culture, Jepara's carving changes significantly.

Islamic culture forbids any form of living creature like the human body and animals. As a result, acculturation occurs between Jepara's wood carving and Islamic culture. It is proven by the rise of distillation forms. On the other hand, wooden furniture carving has been well developed until now. In the Kartini museum that is located in Jepara, there are some picture and historical record about Jepara's wood carving, and how its industry of carving and craft become the icon of this city. Kartini is a female hero from Jepara who lived in the Dutch colonial era and represents the nationalism and woman emancipation in Indonesia. There is a more historical record from centuries before Kartini that mentions about Jepara wood carving. The motives are named Lunglungan Bunga, which means the flower that curls up. Its motif becomes popular in society. The motif created by Kartini later becomes Jepara's original motif (Pujianto, 1999). This motif can be seen in Figure 1.

There are local wisdom factors of the chair that is made from the craftsman in Jepara. It combines foreign culture, religion, and designs that influence the chairs that have been made and result in the unique style and different from their origin (Rombe et al., 2016). Wooden furniture carving industry was part of Jepara's art and culture, and also the main support of Jepara's economic life at that time. Jepara maintained its role as an important port of Java's north coast and was conquered under in the Mataram's reign. Jepara's wooden furniture carving keeps on its big part in the economic life of Jepara's people (Gustami, 2000). In

the Dutch colonial era, Jepara is no longer the main port.



Figure 1 Lunglungan Kembang Motif

The development of Jepara's wooden furniture carving is done partially with the development of art, culture, politic, and economy of Jepara. There is only a few research that contains about Jepara's furniture carving. Most experts and historians are only interested in topics about art, culture, economy, and politic. It causes the existence of Jepara's carving can only take a bit part of the historical writings of those popular topics. It is so hard to find a book that fully discusses Jepara's furniture carving. That is such a pity, knowing there are so many things to be peeled and discussed Jepara's wooden furniture carving. The majority of Jepara people choose the woodcraft industry because of its GDP's value higher than others. The role of Jepara's local government in keeping the existence of the woodcraft industry is divided into three functions; they are regulatory policies, facilitators, and motivators (Wicaksono, 2015).

The government has undertaken several programs to increase the awareness of the need for a design for developing the craft industry in Jepara. Still, almost many programs have discontinued and made the craftsmen have no interest in it. The craftsmen do not continue to produce products with new designs and prefer to continue making products with old designs. For inputs and markets, firms in Jepara in such clusters compete fiercely among themselves, and with similar businesses elsewhere. The globalization makes competition with distant firms less direct and more complex (Roda et al., 2007). On the other side, income grows based on the exporting small and medium-sized enterprises that generate substantial employment. The examples of furniture carvings that are made in Jepara are cupboard, vanity, bed, coffee table, side table, chair, and others.

If it is focused on the chair, there are lots of chair types that are produced in this city. Not only based on its function, but the chairs are also made based on variations in models and shapes. Application of motives and ornaments that tend to the style of the furniture have already made. Furniture turns the shape of ornamental motifs more simple than before.

The other, the carved furniture style that still uses decoration carving ornaments are generally not visible significantly changed (Kurniawan & Widyastuti, 2018). Any detailed historical record could not be found, so it would be hard to identify the age of this model, the old one or the new style.

Garuda chair, which is actually a sofa, is one of few models that is produced in Jepara. This chair originates, which means it is first designed and first produced in Jepara. There is no historical record that could be found. This model is assumed to be a new model. Based on information from a blog of Bulungan's BPD (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa) of Jepara, Dongos village is central of Garuda chair's craftsmen and producers. It is supported by data from an informant named Abdul Ghofur. He is the owner of a furniture store and showroom in Jepara called Furnitek Jepara. He informs that in making Garuda chair, he collaborates with the craftsmen from the Dongos village. He verifies that Dongos village is known as the central of Garuda chair's craftsmen and producers. Figure 2 shows the Dongos village map.



Figure 2 Dongos Village Map
(Source: Google Satelite)

Dongos village is a village in the region of Jepara, precisely at the Kedung sub-region, the north bordered by Sukasono village. In the south and east, it is bordered by Ngeling village, and by Menganti, while Kerso village in the west. The territory of Dongos village is extending about 343.011 Ha all around. It is divided into four *dukuh* (sub-village), which consists of Dukuh Pekiran, Dukuh Sendang, Dukuh Krajan, dan Dukuh Randu Lencer.

Garuda chair is also known with the name Gajah Garuda chair (elephant-Garuda chair) because of its big form, so it needs a bigger space to place it in one-set formation. One set of Garuda chair consists of three pieces of the single-seater sofa, one piece of a three-seater sofa, and one piece of the rectangle-shaped coffee table. From the feet until the crown has a height of 120 cm, with a hand height of 59 cm. The coffee table itself has a length of 97 cm, a width of 47 cm, and a height of 44 cm.

Ghofur, the informant, has stated that he first saw and found out about Garuda chair was not

long before he started his business. Based on his information, Furnitek Jepara was established in 2016. He estimated the timeline and opined that Garuda chair was first produced several years before he does in the furniture business. Although his opinion cannot be verified, several conditions deserve consideration. Jepara is considered as a small city, where wooden furniture carving grows for a long time ago. There are some varieties of chairs indeed, but not too many people to not be known the existence of one variety by Jepara's people, especially the people who are involved in the industry. Any information can be easily spread in Jepara. Information about furniture, such as new models, keeps on spinning within the scope of the community involved in the industry. So it is possible that Garuda chair first appearance was about the informant's statement.

One of the characteristics of Garuda chair is the existence of Garuda-shaped carving on the top or also known as the crown of the chair. Garuda is a mythological creature. In Hindu religious beliefs, Garuda is believed to be one of the Gods with a golden body, white face, and red wings. Its beak and wings take on the shape of the eagle's, while its hand, body, and feet take on the shape of the human's. It is the vehicle of God Wisnu to spread kindness in the world. With its great form, Garuda symbolizes strength and virtue. From that description, Garuda is chosen as the symbol of the Republic of Indonesia. The former heroes of the country intend to visualize Indonesia as a big and strong nation. Depicted with golden feathers and dashing wings stretched, Garuda becomes a national identity. Figure 3 shows the God Wisnu is riding on Garuda.

The assumption goes that the shape Garuda on the crown of the Garuda chair does not refer to it as a God of Hindu beliefs, but the Garuda as Indonesia's national symbol. The body part of the Garuda chair does not take on human body shape as God Garuda does and rather looks like an ordinary bird. Even Hindu dominated the religion in the Majapahit era; in this time, Jepara's population embraces Islam beliefs. Those data support the assumption that the shape of Garuda on the crown of chair refers to Garuda as the national symbol.



Figure 3 The God Wisnu Riding on Garuda
(source : <http://phdi.or.id/artikel/garuda-panca-sila-bagi-umat-hindu>)

The crown of the Garuda chair is the result of the Jepara craftsmen's efforts to innovate by creating new carving motifs. Since the birth of Jepara's wooden furniture carving, the only shape that commonly grown is floral. The chance of Garuda chair to develop in Jepara would be really low. It can be seen in most types of chairs that are produced in Jepara, such as Romawi chair, Monaco chair, Ganesha chair, and another classic model. Garuda chair also has floral carving on its crown indeed, but the main point of the chair is the Garuda carving. Furthermore, this chair is the embodiment of Jepara nationalism, which is visualized in the form of wood carvings in accordance with the Jepara identity, which is identical to the carving. This statement claims the existing assumption, and so it is quite decent to declare that the Garuda on the crown of Garuda chair that is designed by Jepara's craftsmen, refers to Garuda as the national symbol. It can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Garuda Carving on the Crown of Garuda Chair (Source: Laura Wulandari)

In detail form of Garuda chair, the number of feathers on the wings, tail and base of the tail, and neck are not the same as how it is counted on Garuda as the symbol of the Republic of Indonesia. Even the number of feathers can be different from each manufacturer. This shows that the carvings do not make in basic standard for the details. The informant explained, making detailed carvings following the original reference would lead to an increase in cost production. The level of difficulty that grows higher to make detailed carvings. Garuda chair with the usual standard, which is not detailed, is already high cost. The other factors that cause the producing cost of Garuda chair higher compared to others model are its big form, which requires to use more wood than others. There are so many carving all over its crown and feet which cost much for the craftsman's wages.

The carving worker is one of Jepara's carving artists. They learn the art of carving from childhood to survive as a relief engraver today. But, the sculptors receive wages that are not comparable with their expertise, so that the majority of those who work as relief carvers are above 50 years old. The younger generation is no longer interested as relief carvers

(Alamsyah, 2018). The cost of finishing the process (painting, coating, seat manufacture, and installation) itself is quite high. The price of finishing materials and the cost of making the seat are also expensive because they need to maintain the quality of the Garuda chair, which is categorized as luxury furniture.

Compared to the style that is happening nowadays in the market, there are significant differences with Garuda chair in many ways. Scandinavian style has taken back its popularity for the past five years. This style is originated from Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland). The Scandinavian-style design influence comes to Indonesia in two ways; the form of promotion media of their product design concept and academic influence acquired by Indonesian studies in Scandinavian countries (Jamaludin, Firdaus, & Subkiman, 2018). Scandinavian furniture design is marked by clean lines, functional furnishings, mostly used natural material, and the philosophy behind the style remains relevant today (O'Neill, 2017). According to Oriol (2005), Nordic design attempts to achieve a balance form, function, color, texture, durability, and cost. This style can be easily applied in almost every condition. The simple form that is completed by its multifunction, offered at a relatable price, must be the reasons for its return. Despite its simple form, this style does not lose aesthetic value.

Comparing the characteristic of Scandinavian-style chairs to Garuda chair will draw a significant difference. It is more likely to be each other's antithesis. First, it needs more woods to produce a set of Garuda chair. Besides its large structure, wood is also needed to make carvings. Second, the carving process produces much waste, so it is productively ineffective. Third, there are numbers of carving even in a piece of single-seater Garuda chair, while in a full set of Scandinavian-style dining chair has less or no carving at all. Fourth, its large size also requires more space than Scandinavian-style sofas, so it is spatially ineffective. And the fifth, a set of Garuda chair, is more expensive than a set of Scandinavian-style sofa because more than half of its production cost is used on ornament production. At the same time, the function remains only as a common chair.

The maintenance also becomes one of the consumer's concern. People prefer Scandinavian-style chairs because maintenance is relatively easy. Scandinavian style usually does not use excessive finishing, only some simple wood care polish such as doff varnish, antifungal, and termite coat. While the Garuda chair usually uses melamine paint or gloss varnish that needs to be retouched because it is more noticeable when it starts to fade. Antifungal and termite coat is a must. In addition, the pretty floral and Garuda carvings on the Garuda chair traps so much dust. Therefore, to clean a piece of Garuda chair might require more effort than to clean a set of Scandinavian-style sofa, which has clean lines.

However, many other things need to be considered. One of them is socio-cultural factor. In

Indonesian culture, a big family gathering is quite a frequent activity. It happens mostly on certain celebration days such as Eid, Christmas, Chinese New Year, birthday party, and others. Indonesia is a multicultural country where each ethnic and religion has its celebration days. So, that kind of activity could happen multiple times in a year. Some families even do it regularly once a week, or once a month without any special occasion. Based on the socio-cultural background of the Indonesian people, Garuda chair is more suitable than Scandinavian-style sofas because it can contain more people by its big form. Due to its big form, Garuda chair has strong structures so that it can withstand more weight. Besides, Garuda chair usually uses teak wood, which is already known for its strength. The conclusion is, Garuda chair's safety is no doubt when it comes to heavy-duty.

Based on maintenance, the Scandinavian-style chair is superior to Garuda chair because it does not need extra care. Nevertheless, the demands of extra care on the Garuda chair make it more durable and not easily damaged. That makes this kind of product still looks good despite its aging and so attached to an antique impression. The quality and durability worth the expensive price. As a commodity, Garuda chair has degraded in value when compared to Scandinavian style and also other styles that are simpler, practical, and lower cost. However, as a local furniture with a typical form of nationalism that has cultural values, this furniture has a higher commodity value. For some people who have Garuda chair in their mansion represents wealthy. A big furniture only can match in a big place. Only people who have a big house can have a Garuda chair. The chair does not only a tool for seating but also its intersection between the cultural value and commodification.

However, the information about the Garuda chair and how to get this chair are not yet popular for Indonesian people. There are not many media carry this topic up and help the promotion. Mashdurohatur and Mansyur (2017) have mentioned the need for local government policy in providing facilities to the local industry in registering industrial designs carved wooden products, brands, geographical indications, patents, and copyrights. Besides, the local government also facilitates its market and providing product design carved wood industry high creativity, innovation, novelty, and inventive step. With the value behind the Garuda carving and its other surplus, it is possible to make more people change their choice to Garuda chair. The sellers are quite active, indeed, in promoting this product on online sales sites, but the information provided is not detailed enough. Besides, people prefer to see the product directly when it comes to choosing furniture than to see the online catalog. But unfortunately, there are not many furniture shops outside Jepara display Garuda chairs. Compared to Scandinavian-style chairs that are already widely displayed in almost all furniture stores, of course, in terms of promotion, the Garuda chairs are still far behind. Garuda chairs, which are authentic Indonesian

products, are still less popular than international-style chairs.

CONCLUSIONS

The Garuda chair is a chair with Jepara cultural values using the Garuda icon which is closely related to nationalism with ideas and development carried out by local craftsmen. The wood carving style has local characteristics that have the potential to become an Indonesian icon in the international furniture market. To make this chair, a lot of effort is required in relation to special expertise, selected wood materials, and high cost in the finishing process, to obtain the final result that characterizes the strength of it. This is inversely proportional to the financial condition of the craftsmen who get inadequate income with their carving skills. The strength of the furniture industry carried out by small-to-medium scale carving craftsmen is pushed by market conditions.

The presence of recent furniture trends from abroad influences the market to tend to make a choice in chairs that are simpler, minimalist, with smaller sizes, and easier maintenance. Modern lifestyle shifts make people ignore the furniture choices such as Garuda chair that carries a strong cultural value.

Regulation is needed from all parties who hold the policy to be able to make furniture with Indonesian cultural value as a commodity that can survive in the market. Promotions and training for craftsmen to develop Garuda chair according to market tastes need to be realized by the government and the furniture crafts community in Jepara. Community support is expected to strengthen by choosing furniture with cultural values that represent the nationality value of the nation, such as the Garuda chair.

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