

KILLER'S FASHION: TRANSFORMING THE POTENTIAL OF NIAS SABER'S AMULETS INTO INDONESIAN FASHION ACCESSORIES

Kezia Clarissa Langi^{1*}; Setiawan Sabana²; Hafiz Aziz Ahmad³; Dian Widiawati⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Doctoral Program of Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology

Jl. Ganesha No.10, Lb. Siliwangi, Coblong, Bandung 40132, Indonesia

¹kezialangi91@students.itb.ac.id; ²setiawansabana@yahoo.com; ³hafizsan@yahoo.com; ⁴wdnialang@yahoo.com

Received: 15th May 2020/ **Revised:** 29th May 2020/ **Accepted:** 05th June 2020

How to Cite: Langi, K. C., Sabana, S., Ahmad, H. A., & Widiawati, D. (2020). Killer's fashion: Transforming the potential of Nias saber's amulets into Indonesian fashion accessories. *Humaniora*, 11(2), 123-130. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v11i2.6416>

ABSTRACT

The research was conducted to discover the potential of Nias saber's amulets into fashion accessories and to introduce the tradition of Nias saber's amulets into society. Nias war costume had its unique way of distinguishing each other and gaining a spiritual strength, which was to accessorize its war costume with small amulets. This tradition was a new inspiration for developing a fashion look with local identity. Exploring Indonesian culture in the form of fashion accessories was done in order to extract Indonesian potential in the fashion industry. Styling small 'amulets' into clothing could elevate one's look while gaining a local meaning. The research applied a qualitative method with data collected through interviews, literature studies, and field research. The outcome of the research shows that Nias war costume's amulet can be an inspiration for today's fashion accessories that serve traditional meaning to the wearer.

Keywords: fashion transformation, Nias's saber, amulet, fashion accessories design

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is formed through the long history of empire before becoming a republic which people know today. Indonesian diverse cultural values are considered a heritage. These legacies are product of various traditions and spiritual achievements in the form of values from the past. These values are a central element in the identity of a group or nation. Cultural heritage is distinguished as a form of culture as ideas that are intangible such as values, norms, rules and so on. Secondly, the form of culture as activities is namely the patterned actions of humans in social life. And finally, as the artifacts is the creation of material goods (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Nias is an ethnic tribe in Indonesia that uses accessories to distinguish each individual. Nias tribe practices a war society; as a result, the tribe is serious in producing and decorating war equipment (Langi, Sabana, & Ahmad, 2020; Viaro, 2001). Nias soldiers wear war clothing with the same basic structure; therefore, it needs personal decorations to distinguish

one soldier from another. The decoration consists of war helmet, textural decoration on the war armor, and amulets on the sabers (see Figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1 Nias Nobleman with his Beautifully Decorated Saber (1915)



Figure 2 Group of Warriors from South Nias

Nias is an island located on the West side of Sumatra. Since 851 AD, the island is known for its fierce warriors and constantly practicing civil war (Telaumbanua, 2019). Although the Nias society distrust foreigners, they are known as slave traders with gold and copper as its barter currency. Gold is used by the Nias kings and family as accessories that portray identity and wealth. They love to decorate themselves with accessories. Royalties, soldiers, and commoners use organic materials, animal skin, and animal bones with rare, interesting items, such as bottle caps, and small porcelain figures that have personal meanings to display their status and to differ with others. This local culture is a new way to portray personal identity as an Indonesian through accessories.

Regional cultural values do not refer to the geographical areas that have clear administrative boundaries. For example, Javanese culture does not own only by people who live in Java. The culture is also owned by people who practice the culture and lives in another region. The word 'local culture' is owned by the indigenous people who have been seen as the cultural heirs (Karmadi, 2007). However, in this era of globalization, where people can reside in another region, even abroad due to study, work, or marriage, a cultural value can be deterritorialized. Culture is increasingly open and accessible to other communities. According to Sugiharto (2020), culture can be questioned, reviewed, translated, enhanced, staged in the transactional process with other cultures. As a result, culture can survive, adapt, and become a new culture, or even disappear due to its irrelevant usage.

The manifestation of Indonesia's cultural heritage has been expressed in the form of clothing, such as clothes and its accessories. Indonesia is a multicultural country; therefore, local characteristics and rules are embedded in each clothing. Indonesian traditional clothing has several specific cultural messages that appear from the visual structures, colors, patterns, and techniques of creating a dress. Through traditional clothing, a person can communicate his or her identity, social class, or ethnic background (Hadijah, 2014). Successful self-identity through traditional clothing will create a cultural identity that is able to be recognized by others. Traditional clothing consists of daily wear, customary clothing (*adat*), ritual clothing related to birth, maturity, marriage, death, and uniforms, such as dance costumes, royal, and the war uniforms.

Along with the development of civilization, Indonesian traditional clothing also develops in accordance with the era. Advanced science and technology have become a source of inspiration for society with their local culture. Modern clothing, which is clothing with the influence of western culture, is called fashion. The style enters into the life of Indonesian society through colonialism. The Dutch colonial period in Indonesia determines the ethnic status and social status of their clothing. Indonesian aristocrats have adapted the structure of local royal

clothing with the fusion of European and local cultures (Figure 3). Batik fabrics that represent local culture are made in the Dutch, Chinese, and Japanese styles to distinguish their status from the local Indonesian community. Kebaya, a traditional Javanese dress, is also distinguished by clothing structure. The type of material can classify one's ethnicity and status when it is worn, which can be seen in Figures 4 and 5 (Lukman, Piliang, & Sunarto, 2013).

Independence does not change the mindset of Indonesian society regarding clothing structure. The era of globalization with the influence of fast information makes fashion trends rapidly adapted by Indonesia's people. Influences from public figures such as celebrities, politicians, and religious figures can influence a person's fashion or style of dress. This shows that the status of power and wealth through western mode has ruled from the colonial era to the present.



Figure 3 Javanese Official Wearing Official Uniform with European Styled Clothing and Accessories



Figure 4 Dutch Lady Wearing Dutch Kebaya with Batik



Figure 5 Chinese Kebaya Made with Silk, Embroidery, and Chinese Styled Batik and Accessory

Fashion as a lifestyle shows that clothing does not function solely as a cover for the body. It is also a medium to express self-worth, construct an identity, and become a medium of communication of social values, such as economic status and cultural significance. In general, types of luxury goods are divided into four parts; fashion products (clothing and accessories); perfume and cosmetics; wine and

alcohol; and watches and jewelry. The most prestigious products in the category of luxury goods are fashion products (Amatulli et al., 2016). In modern society, fashion and lifestyle help determine one's attitude, life value, economic, and social status.

The key to optimizing a look is the accessories. This process is done by mix-matching several pieces of clothing with accessories to create the desired impression. Generally, someone combines accessories from luxury fashion brands and clothing from fast fashion. This is caused by the influence of the brand's strength, price, and identity of a fashion brand. The styling process makes the clothes continuously wearable, therefore creating various impressions. Logically, a person is better able to buy fashion accessories than fashion in the form of clothing. Clothes have a longer and more complex manufacturing method; therefore, pricing will be higher. In contrast, fashion accessories tend to complement clothing so that its presence is optional but significant. Fashion accessories have a decorative function that gives a complete impression, shows social status, and gives psychological satisfaction. Therefore, fashion accessories design innovation is an ideal potential since it is easily produced at low cost and can be used repeatedly.

Fashion accessories in Indonesia must have their own identity. Globalization, refined information, and fast technology create challenges for Indonesia's young generation. The influence of foreign cultures may affect local cultures into three possibilities; creating new cultures, developing old cultures, or eliminating old cultures (Agustin, 2011; Prayogi & Danial, 2016). Incorporating the value of local wisdom in Indonesian fashion, especially in fashion accessories, is an effort to reclaim and preserve Indonesian culture. Preservation of the items are not by being treated as an artifact stored in a museum, but as a culture that can develop along with civilization. The research is needed for the Indonesian society to discover the potential of Indonesian culture, especially the Nias saber's amulets by innovating the designs in modern fashion accessories.

Previous research on innovations in fashion accessories design has been investigated, but using a different topic and approach, namely a case study of the Tulola jewelry brand that uses Balinese culture in its design inspiration. Nugraha (2016) has used iconographic studies to identify, describe, and interpret icons based on the attributes that mark them. The research discusses the characteristics of fashion accessories from traditional Balinese shapes, motifs, colors, and materials with modern techniques (Nugraha, 2016). It uses a case study approach. Therefore, the design innovation process studied is the analysis of the researcher, not the designer. However, the research proves that by taking the unique characteristics of an area without changing the aesthetics and meaning, combining them with modern techniques and appropriate branding will give a certain emotional message to the wearer.

Previous discussions regarding the potential of the modern techniques of making fashion accessories today have been carried out by the merging of digital electronics and foreign techniques. Bone china ceramics techniques as fashion accessories in this digital era have been studied by Lusiana (2014) from the Bandung Institute of Technology. The research discusses the potential of the technique, character, and nature of bone china to be developed as fashion accessories in the digital age. The results of the research are recommendations for fashion accessories products with an aesthetic combination of bone china and functional techniques such as bracelets or necklaces that double the digital clock and combine products with electronic attributes that can be controlled with smartphones (Lusiana, 2014). The research discusses the potential of specific fashion accessories manufacturing techniques and combines them with digital technology, but does not discuss techniques and designs inspired by Indonesian's local culture.

From these previous researches, it is discovered that the Indonesian fashion industry is starting to develop towards Indonesian's iconic icons with the exploration of traditional and modern techniques. Previous research reveals that fashion, including clothing and accessories, is a form of communication and gives meaning to the wearer. It does not discuss nor recommend innovations in fashion accessories design from artifacts of Indonesian clothing accessories; therefore, the research is important.

The research focuses on amulets stored in Nias saber called *Tolögu*. Accessories are added to the inner and outer *ragö*. *Ragö* is a rattan ball tied to the Nias saber, which is the source of aura of the Nias warrior. Amulets in *ragö* have aesthetic and spiritual roles by adding specific powers to the wearer. The amulets refer to small objects with cultural and personal values for the wearer (Hämmerle in Langi, Sabana, & Ahmad, 2020). Nias saber is the pride of the warrior that can be decorated personally. The accessories worn on the Nias saber determine how long a person has been a warrior and his personal needs. In the research, the Nias saber's amulet is positioned as an artifact of clothing accessories with meaning and material, so the depth of meaning based on the material needs to be analyzed. The purposes of the research examine the definition of Indonesian fashion accessories, Nias saber's construction, analysis of the fundamental values of Nias saber's amulets, and fashion accessories design recommendations.

METHODS

The research is a qualitative study with data collected through interviews, literature studies, and field research. A literature study is done on Nias cultural literature, Nias saber's amulets, and its meanings from books and research journals. Historical photos are taken from the online archive of Ancestral Arts,

and a website that discusses community traditions on the islands of Southeast Asia and Oceania, curated by Steven G. Alpert, a senior expert and winning writer. Field data is carried out on 22 and 23 August 2019 at the Nias Heritage Museum and Bawomataluo Village. Interviews are conducted with the initiators of the Nias Heritage Museum, Father Johannes Maria Hämmerle, and the director of the Nias Heritage Museum, Nata'alui Duha. The field research has been published as a proceeding. The results of reduction and analysis of literature and field research are to determine the meaning of Nias saber's amulet, which can be used as a potential inspiration for fashion accessories innovation.

The research uses a material culture of fashion methodology, a joint method borrowed from anthropology and archeology, where the object (artifact) is central in social, cultural, and economic studies. These studies consider artifacts as central to the analysis of different periods and themes. This methodology is compiled by Giorgio Riello, a professor from the University of Warwick, England. This method is a complementary method for fashion because it supports fashion as an artifact with meaning and material (Riello, 2012). The research uses fashion psychological theory that places fashion and discusses it with human behavior to influence human cognitive processes. This theory also discusses how the fashion industry can influence consumer behavior. It can be seen in Figure 6.

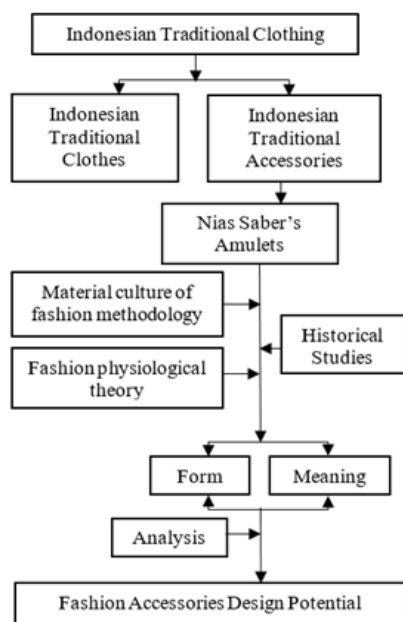


Figure 6 Research Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The expression of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage has been reflected in its accessories. In general, accessories are complementary to clothes and optional to wear because of their function, which adds

value to the appearance. The definition of traditional Indonesian accessories is goods or objects used to beautify one's self in accordance with tradition or custom (Husni & Siregar, 2000).

Indonesian traditional accessories have an important role in the social life of Indonesian society. They are used in rituals closely related to the journey of human life, namely in birth, maturity, and death. In birth, accessories can be given to babies, as in Bali's *nelubulanin* ritual (a three-month ritual for a newborn). The bracelets in the form of threads on baby's hands and feet are replaced with silver bracelets indicating the child becomes a complete human being (Sunarti, 2017). The journey of life is marked by ritual markers of maturity and weddings. Ritual markers of maturity in Nias are marked when a man succeeds in doing a *hombo batu* tradition (stone jumping). He will be announced a soldier and can insert amulets or decorations to his armor with the meaning of courage, strength, and protection (Taylor & Aragon, 1991; Viaro, 2001). The wedding in the Sundanese community by the ceremony of *seserahan*, which is an event where the bridegroom is to be delivered to the groom's in-laws. The ritual in this ceremony is done to provide several items needed by the bride, one of which is jewelry such as bracelets, necklaces, and rings (Rachmawaty, 2011). In the journey of death, a religious ritual in the *Rambu Solo Tana Toraja* ceremony in Celebes is a tradition when the coffin is decorated with traditional cloth, ropes, and trinkets from gold and silver.

The early function of traditional accessories in Indonesia has a magical function to increase the user's power or authority. In traditional societies, this accessory shows social status because it is proof of the deeds it does. This status distinguishes degrees between ordinary people, tribal chiefs, or soldiers. Accessories with magical functions often use feathers or animal fangs. Human civilization development improves accessories created with technology, such as forging and filing techniques; therefore, the metal material could be used. Traditional accessories then develop with additional functions, namely as a medium of exchange and as heirlooms (Husni & Siregar, 2000). It can be ascertained that almost all Indonesia regions have archaeological relics in the form of accessories, especially jewelry produced during the Iron Age (Kaerodiharjo et al. in Husni & Siregar, 2000).

Nias tribe practices a war society system. Nias people are unique in their way of producing and decorating their war equipment (Hadiwinoto et al., 2008; Viaro, 2001). The abundance of confidence and self-esteem of a warrior is shown in the seriousness of manufacturing and decorating war equipment, namely in the helmet, armor, and weaponry.

Nias armor provides spiritual and psychological strength to the wearer. Before the war, the two conflicting village representative parties would meet to discuss. At that meeting psychologically, the opponent will be intimidated. Often a party will feel defeated when they see the elaborate decoration of their

opponents' war costume even though their opponents might have fewer soldiers (Duha in Langi, Sabana, & Ahmad, 2020). If no meeting points or a party are willing to surrender, then war will occur immediately. In this case, spiritually, the accessories from the saber will give strength or aura to the wearer. Nias saber has the function of cutting, stabbing, and parrying, therefore this saber is designed to be comfortable to use with one hand. The characteristic of Nias saber is its lightweight. In accordance with its function, Nias saber means 'like revenging in a hidden way' (Duha, 2011).

Nias saber construction is divided into four parts, namely saber's blades, handles, saber's sheaths, and *ragö* that can be seen in Figure 7. The first part is the saber's blade. Nias saber has a one-edged blade that curves towards the top or bottom, and the shape of the blade will be thicker and wider at the end. The saber's blades are usually made of yellow iron (*besi kuning*) and done by forging.



Figure 7 Dismantling Construction of the Nias Saber

The second part is the saber's handle. The handle is short in size with a *lasara* head ornament at the end. *Lasara* is a mythical animal of Nias, and its applications can vary according to the creativity of their owners. Saber's handles are designed with three features; first is to be held with one hand, then to protect a soldier's hand; and last is for hitting his opponent. Saber's handle material can be either a very hardwood or ivory. The way to join the blade with the handle is to insert a piece of wood or ivory into the tip of the blade while being forged. When it is united, then the handle's side is given a small piece of iron that is used as a lock so that the handle becomes sturdy.

The third part is the saber's sheaths that show the wearer's status. When the two wooden blades are joined by wire or iron, the owner is an ordinary soldier. However, if it is put together with brass or gold, the wearer is a *si'ulu* (nobleman). Saber's sheaths have a characteristic of a striped pattern (dual tone). The handle hole is made with a special shape to secure it when sheathed. This is made so that the saber's blade does not fall from the sheath, especially when the warrior is actively moving, such as jumping and running. The way to remove the blade from the sheaths is to move it upwards so that the lock is released.

Last is *ragö*. It is a rattan ball tied to the base of a saber's sheath. Usually, *ragö* is decorated with wild

boar fangs, crocodile fangs, or tiger fangs, and filled with amulets believed in providing spiritual strength to the wearer (Feldman et al., 1990; Hadiwinoto et al., 2008; Viaro, 2001).

The source of strength of a soldier is believed to come from the amulet pinned to his saber. Nias saber's amulet is selected and analyzed according to soldiers' cultural and personal meanings (Table 1). Nias saber has several amulets often used, such as animal fangs and *adu* (wooden ancestral statues). Animal fangs used as amulets are boar and crocodile fangs. Tiger claw is also used, and it is usually thick and short. Boar fangs characteristics are thin with long curved upward, which means protection from enemies. In Nias culture, tigers are often associated with a king, representing protection, strength, and intelligence. Crocodile fangs are short and sharp. Crocodiles are associated with the underworld and ancestral punishment. Crocodiles are often considered elegant killers, strategic in preying (Taylor & Aragon, 1991). *Adu horö* is the ancestral medium for soldiers to ask for protection of the god of war and serves as a cleanser of the sin of headhunting (*mengayau*) (Tropen Museum, n.d). *Adu horö*, which is a saber amulet, is a human-shaped wood carving with two meaningful horns to protect from death and provide success in headhunting (*mengayau*).

The addition of amulets into *ragö* signifies the personal needs of the wearer. Therefore, amulets portray personal meaning. Amulets with iron, rattan, and coral materials symbolizes strength. Rare objects that are achieved by hunting, bartering, or bought from foreign traders can be in the form of shells, fossil shark tooth, ceramic dolls, to bottle caps showing the greatness of the soldiers. Some amulets can be in the form of red cloth that shows the bravery of warriors and black which means warrior's death (Langi, Sabana, & Ahmad, 2019; 2020; Taylor & Aragon, 1991).

The potential for the development of Indonesian fashion accessories design with the uniqueness of the Nias saber amulets can become a new identity both in the local and global markets. Nias amulet's untold story should be known, especially to Indonesian society, as its cultural treasure. The shifting of Indonesian society into a democratic and religious state effects the production and usage of Nias amulets as an accessory.

The research suggests to create innovation of designs that embedded the structure and meaning of Nias saber's amulets. Nias is known for its skills in making war equipment and gold jewelry. Both of these skills are addressed to high statuses citizens, namely soldiers and noblemen. Both of these materials do not originate from Nias but are obtained from trade with other nations such as Arabia, China, and the Netherlands; therefore, their usage has a high-status meaning (Feldman et al., 1990; Taylor & Aragon, 1991; Zaluchu & Widjaja, 2019). The research proposes the usage of a metal material such as iron and gold for fashion accessories. The technique of forging and filling is ideal for achieving the characteristics of making objects in detail. These fashion accessories aim to create small objects.

Nias saber amulets have the meaning of protection, success, strength, intelligence, greatness, and courage for the wearer (Table 1). The potential of the Nias saber amulets in the form of an amulet can be transformed into charm in fashion accessories by developing forms without changing meaning.

The research recommends making five accessories in small, removable shapes according to the characteristics of the Nias saber amulets shape. Fashion accessories that can be developed according to these characteristics are a form of charm for belts, bags, shoes, jewelry, and clothing details such as buttons, collar details, and cufflinks (Table 2).

The first design is a decorative hanger for fashion accessories, such as bags or purses. This type of accessories can be used in various objects, and the charms can easily be modified with different shaped charms. This design uses amulet shapes such as *adu horö*, boar fangs, iron, and shells as its decorations. It signifies protection, success, and greatness. The second design is a belt with decorative charms. The belt is a fashion accessory that has a function to secure pants or skirts, as well as an aesthetic feature to improve one's look. The belt can be a statement of fashion, therefore adding charms can improve the value of appearance. The shape of charms in this fashion accessory is *adu horö*, crocodile fangs, and shells. This accessory defines protection, success, attitude, and greatness.

The third design is earrings. Statement accessories such as jewelry can be used daily. Small

shaped earrings are complimentary of one's look, which is not overpowering yet adding value. This earring is in the shape of carved iron and beads charm. The design of Nias saber's amulet that resembles a face is made into two parts. The front part is the eyes and upper teeth, while the back, the earring hook, is the lower teeth. Forth design is a collar decorator. This accessory is added for simple shirts to give an impression. The shape of the charm is the head of *adu horö*, which has two horns' uniqueness on its head and becomes an icon in this accessory. The two heads are completed by a snake chain, which gives an elegant impression. This accessory is attached to the collar and can be replaced with another form of charm. This design conveys protection and success. The fifth design is a decorative button. Simple jackets or coats can be decorated with a button camouflage. This decoration creates an iconic look by using the shape of tiger claws. The claws are stacked, inspired by the construction of the fangs seen in *ragö*. This design symbolizes the value of strength and intelligence.

These suggested designs prove the potential of Nias saber's amulets can be developed into daily fashion accessories. The small charms are not overpowering a look and portray the value of the original amulets. The success rate of these accessories design is not solely based on the aesthetic factor, but when the accessories with meaningful ideas accessible, understandable, and valuable for the customers. In addition, the accessories should be able to be reproduced.

Tabel 1 Fundamental Values of Nias Saber's Amulets













Image	Amulet	Value	Image	Amulet	Value
	<i>Adu horö</i>	Protection and success		Crocodile skin	Killer's attitude
	Crocodile fang	Killer's attitude		Crocodile fang	
	Iron	Strength		Boar fang	Protection
	Rattan	Strength		Rattan	Strength
	Coral	Strength			
	Shell	Greatness (rarity)		<i>Adu horö</i>	Protection and success
	Iron	Signifying teeth		Red cloth	Bravery
	Beads	Portraying eyes		Black cloth	Fierceness
	Tiger fang	Strength and intelligence		Shark tooth	Greatness (rarity)
	Chinese porcelain	Greatness (rarity)		Tiger claw	Strength and intelligence
	Boar fang	Protection			

Table 2 Development of Fashion Accessories Design with Inspiration from Nias Saber's Amulet

Design	Amulet	Value	Design	Amulet	Value
	<i>Adu horö</i>	Protection and success		<i>Adu horö</i>	Protection and success
	Boar fang	Killer's attitude		Crocodile fang	Killer's attitude
	Iron	Strength		Shell	Greatness (rarity)
	Shell	Greatness (rarity)			
	<i>Adu horö</i>	Signifying teeth		<i>Adu horö</i>	Protection and success
	Beads	Portraying eyes			
	Tiger claw	Strength and intelligence			

CONCLUSIONS

An Indonesian fashion accessory is a promising industry. Fashion accessories are complementary, yet show significant results in adding values to an appearance. The fact that customers often purchase high-end accessories due to its affordable price and reusable purposes creates a traditional Indonesian accessory to be potentially developed.

Nias' traditional accessories in the form of amulets are the main inspiration for the research. The amulets are medium to communicate the warrior's identity, rank, and value. Nias war saber's amulet is considered an accessory because it is used to decorate clothing; in this case, the war costume, while obtaining spiritual values. The analysis process is done by categorizing the amulets from six sabers into images, amulet, and its value. According to the research, the values are protection, success, attitude, strength, greatness, portraying body parts, intelligence, and bravery.

The research concludes that Nias saber's amulets can be developed as Indonesian fashion accessories. The purpose of developing the amulets into a fashion accessory is to reuse traditional identity into Indonesian fashion. The potential of fashion accessory developments is small charms that are replaceable with other shapes. The research recommends the creation of collar decoration, cufflinks, hanger, earrings, and belt decoration.

The research's future study can focus on the materials of the accessories such as ceramics or 3D prints for jewelry-based design, resin, and plastic mold. These techniques can produce the same details

and small objects. Other future studies can focus on the same method in developing other local artifacts into a fashion accessory. Therefore, new versions of traditional Indonesian accessories can be produced and introduced.

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