

Knowledge of Natural Materials in Craft Arts in Suriname for Learning Indonesian Carving and Weaving Arts in the Javanese Diaspora Community

Tri Wahyudi^{1*}, Hanggar Budi Prasetya², Dipo Krishyudi Ono³

**Corresponding Author*

¹ Universitas Esa Unggul, Jakarta, Indonesia

² Institut Seni Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³ Universitas Pakuan, Bogor, Indonesia

tri.wahyudi@esaunggul.ac.id, hanggarbp@gmail.com, dipo@unpak.ac.id
Tel: +628179 485 917

Abstract

As part of a country in the South American region, Suriname has approximately 15% of the population of Javanese ethnicity; they come from communities that experienced part of the migration process during the Dutch colonial period. They are still trying to find a cultural identity from Java in Indonesia, including making traditional art. However, the materials used to make conventional works of art are quite different from those in Indonesia. The research employs qualitative methods, revealing that wood carving and weaving art techniques enhance Suriname's identity, allowing it to compete and create products on par with other communities.

Keywords: Suriname; craft arts; Javanese diaspora

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1.0 Introduction

Suriname is part of the South American region. Approximately 15% of the population of Javanese ethnic origin come from communities that experienced part of the migration process during the Dutch colonial period; the culture that entered various aspects of the social environment of the community seems to be adopted into a cultural identity in the Javanese community in Suriname, as well as other ethnicities this identity becomes very important amid various tribes, races. The number of ratios is as follows in the country of Suriname, namely the first is derived from ethnic Indians which amounted to approximately 27%, which is then followed by creole and maroon ethnic communities around 15%, which is then followed by Javanese ethnicity which amounted to 13%, and the rest is followed by Indigenous Amerindians and other migrants.

Each ethnicity that initially became immigrants in the country indeed continues to seek cultural values and identities brought by their ancestors who were brought in during slavery to become enslaved people or coolies who worked in the plantation and processing industry in sugar factories; for example, we can see now on *Diwali day* which continues to be celebrated by people of Indian descent in

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Suriname, Suriname Amerindian culture which is the indigenous tribe of Suriname which usually also celebrates indigenous day every August 9, and also a dance culture which is also always celebrated by people of African descent.

What is interesting about the Creole ethnicity is that the culture from Africa that they bring to Suriname is not only performing arts but also traditional fine arts that appear in their carved artwork; this may also be the anxiety of the Javanese community in Suriname so that an NGO / NGO called VHJ / Sana Budaya was formed where the organization accommodates the Javanese community of Suriname to become a gathering place. One of the parts of Sana Budaya is the establishment of the Volksacademie made by the artist Soeki Irodikromo specifically to teach fine arts, one of the activities is making handicraft art.

They are still trying to find a cultural identity from Java in Indonesia, including making traditional artworks. However, the materials used to make traditional artworks differ significantly from those in Indonesia. Transferring knowledge about the materials and skills used to make traditional artworks is very important for the Javanese ethnic community so that this knowledge can be used to further clarify the value of local wisdom from the Javanese in the form of art knowledge that can be adopted and developed again by the Javanese in Suriname and enrich the cultural diversity of the Surinamese nation.

2.0 Literature Review

Research on using natural materials in craft has been of interest in various studies, mainly about utilizing local knowledge and cultural heritage in art practices. This journal highlights the natural resources in Suriname and their potential in teaching carving and weaving to the Surinamese Javanese diaspora community. The challenges and opportunities faced in learning and preserving traditional arts in a foreign country are the main focus of this review.

2.1 Crafts and Knowledge of Natural Materials

Craft is an art form that utilizes natural materials to create beautiful and functional works of art. Local knowledge of natural materials, such as plant fibers, wood, and natural dyes, is essential in the making of craft art; a journal written by Surya & Mutmaniah entitled "Anyam Crafts as Preservation of Local Wisdom" can provide insight that even woven art in its manufacture correlates with local natural resources (Surya & Mutmaniah, 2015), even in the archipelago we can find it quickly so that weaving can be applied to make various kinds of crafts such as mats, baskets, and hats.

2.2 Javanese Diaspora in Suriname

The Javanese diaspora community in Suriname has a long history that began with the arrival of Javanese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. According to a research journal titled "*Where is Home? Changing Conceptions of the Homeland in the Surinamese-Javanese diaspora*," written by Hoefte & Mingoen (2022), many of them strive to maintain and teach Javanese cultural heritage, including in the arts. However, the younger generation often lacks the necessary knowledge and skills to continue this tradition.

2.3 Learning the Art of Jepara Carving

An article entitled "The Regeneration Crisis of Young Carvers and the Existence of Jepara Carving Cultural Wisdom (Case Study in Mulyoharjo Village, Jepara Regency)" written by Rokhis Saidah, Semarang State University became a literature study that learning the art of carving and weaving requires a deep understanding of the issue of regeneration to the community (Saidah, 2017), not only in terms of techniques and materials. In Indonesia, this technique is passed down from generation to generation through a teacher-student or family system; learning Jepara carving art becomes an identity for carving art adopted by the Javanese community by conducting learning in the Surinamese Javanese community can simultaneously regenerate the ability of carving art as well as Javanese identity.

2.4 Local Knowledge in Suriname

The book, derived from research entitled "Ethnobotany Linking Traditional Plant Use to Health, History, and Heritage," found that local knowledge about natural materials in Suriname is rich and diverse. The study (Andel, 2014) shows that local people deeply understand various types of wood, plant fibers, and natural dyes that can be used in craft art. The Javanese diaspora community can utilize this knowledge to develop their carving and weaving practices.

2.5 Cultural Integration and Preservation

A journal entitled "Pandanus Woven Crafts: A Creative Industry Based on Local Wisdom for National and Global Markets." It is one of the literature reviews in this journal because it contains how knowledge of materials and tools derived from nature, namely pandanus, can be utilized for the manufacture of craft art; the connection with craft knowledge in Javanese Surinamese society, in particular, can be a comparison to try to integrate Surinamese local knowledge with traditional Javanese art practices to enrich the learning process and cultural preservation. This journal studies the potential and prospects for pandanus woven crafts from pandanus Samak species as a superior creative industry based on local wisdom. The method used is descriptive qualitative, which describes the definition, raw materials, equipment, production techniques, and product results. This study is expected to provide insight into the sustainable craft industry and inspire the growth of new businesses in the field of pandanus woven crafts in Suriname.

3.0 Methodology

The writing of this journal reinforces the research conducted by the previous author that the identity of the Javanese ethnicity in Suriname will finally find a new cultural pattern both from the pattern of daily life, culture, behavior and even artistic expressions, both visual and performing arts which of course cannot be separated from the influence of Javanese ethnic culture in general but turns into a new culture as a result of the combination of all the elements that exist in the aspects of various environments and cultures in South America. In this study, the author used a qualitative research method using the “Case Study” theory approach.

The steps taken to use qualitative research methods with an explanatory case study approach (Subadi, 2006), are as follows:

1. Case Selection: Selecting a specific study case involves defining criteria to choose participants or phenomena relevant to the research question. This study focuses on providing carving and weaving instruction to the Surinamese Javanese community. The participants are Javanese individuals enrolled in carving and weaving courses at VHJI (Sana Budaya).



Fig. 1: (a) Weaving course in Sana Budaya; (b) Woodcarving course at Sana Budaya
(Source: Wahyudi, 2018)

2. Data Collection: A thorough and systematic approach is meticulously employed to gather data using various methods suitable for a qualitative framework. These methods include interviews, observations, document analysis, and examination of artifacts. Data collection involved asking questions to participants of the carving and weaving courses at VHJI (Sana Budaya) between July 30 and October 10, 2018.



Fig. 2: (a) Discussing the shape of Javanese ornaments; (b) Course participant interviews and discussions
(Source: Wahyudi, 2018)

3. Data Analysis: The collected data is analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. Qualitative data analysis techniques typically involve note-taking and developing theoretical interpretations based on the results of interviews with course participants at VHJI (Sana Budaya) in Suriname.

4. Refinement: The research process is not a rigid framework but rather a flexible and adaptable journey. It is refined iteratively based on analyses, demonstrating its adaptability. This may involve adjusting data collection strategies or revising the theoretical framework, highlighting the research's flexibility and robustness.

5. Report Writing: The research findings are presented in a written report. This report includes a clear outline of the research methods, a presentation of the data analysis, and an interpretation of the results in the context of the research question. It reflects the insights gained during the study, particularly emphasizing the unique perspectives of the Surinamese Javanese community.

4.0 Findings

The introduction of traditional fine arts or crafts to the Surinamese Javanese community, in principle, is not something new to them; amidst the cultural crossing that occurs between ethnicities in the Surinamese community, one of the artistic forms of traditional fine arts in the form of carving has long been developed by the Maroon tribe in Suriname, they with the ability to make carved works of art by utilizing simple materials such as natural wood, cutters, sandpaper, and others can create an authentic work of art and eventually become an identity of art in the tribe.



Fig. 3: (a) Maroon tribe carving artwork; (b) Maroon Wood Carving Equipment.
(Source: Wahyudi, 2018)

In 2018, the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Paramaribo, led by the Indonesian Ambassador, Dominicus Supratikto, initiated an initiative to send artists from Indonesia, namely Tri Wahyudi and Pudji Utomo, for the first time to assist in making carving and weaving art to people of Javanese descent in Suriname. The initiative was held in several places, such as Sana Budaya and Directorate Culture Suriname.

In conducting this activity, the more effective method is the community development method, which looks at common interests, identifies needs, and then carries out the same activities to solve the community's needs. According to Chambers, community empowerment is an economic development concept that summarizes social values. This concept reflects a new paradigm of development that is "people-centered," participatory, empowering, and sustainable. Empowerment is broader than just an effort to meet basic needs or a mechanism to prevent further impoverishment processes (safety net). According to Jim Ife, the concept of empowerment has a close relationship with two main concepts, namely, the idea of power ("power") and the concept of disadvantage ("inequality"). The definition of empowerment can be explained using four perspectives: pluralist, elitist, structuralist, and post-structuralist.

The level of participation from the Javanese community, especially those of Javanese descent, was unexpectedly high. Their enthusiasm was evident in the three-month learning program, which was followed with great zeal. All their works were proudly exhibited at the Indofair event

5.0 Discussion

In this regard, the author uses pluralist empowerment as one of the perspectives to empower the people of Suriname. From a pluralist perspective, community empowerment is a process that helps individuals and groups of disadvantaged people compete more effectively with other interests. The empowerment effort is to help them learn, use lobbying skills, use media related to political action, and understand how the system works (game rules). Therefore, efforts are needed to increase the capacity of the community to compete pretty so that no one wins or loses. In other words, community empowerment is an effort to teach groups or individuals how to compete within the rules.

So, from this perspective, the author uses a teaching method using two media, namely the media of Traditional Fine Arts and the media of Carving and Weaving Art techniques; the following describes the learning techniques used in these media.

5.1 Wood Carving

The Fine Arts were brought to teach the Surinamese community to use traditional acceptable arts methods, namely wood carving and weaving art. Carving and weaving are part of Javanese culture, and the Surinamese Javanese community is also interested in learning them. The carving learning model brought for learning in Suriname is the same form of learning in Indonesia, which, in this case, the author adopts from the learning system learned by carving craftsmen living in Jepara, Central Java.

The carvers in Jepara use several tools and techniques related to the tools the craftsmen call Tatah (Javanese language) or Pahat (Indonesian language). In 1 box sheet, the tool is approximately 25; the following describes some of the tools used for learning traditional fine arts:

1. Tatah / Chisel (Penguku, Kol, Penyilat)
2. Ganden/Wood Hammer
3. Paper, Pencil, Eraser
4. F-Clamp

As for wood media, we do not find teak wood at all in Suriname, as wood is commonly used to make carved works of art. The reason for using Teak wood is that it is not only challenging and easy to shape, but the quality of the wood fiber character has a fairly artistic shape. That's why teak wood is in great demand among Javanese people who want to own artwork. In addition, teak wood is very easily obtained on Java island because most villagers are still cultivating the plants to be planted.

The solution to the problem is that Teak wood is not found in Suriname. The participants, under the assistance of the carving teacher, tried to find alternatives, one of which was cedar or Pisi wood. The quality of cedar wood, which is very light, strong, and easy to shape, makes this wood a medium for carving and art for learning about the Javanese community of Suriname.



Fig. 4: (a) Art carving activities at VHJI; (b) Wood raw materials and chisels.
(Source: Wahyudi, 2018)

5.2 Weaving Art



Fig. 5: (a) Amerindian weavers; (b) Woven works from Suriname, guided by Pudji Utomo;
(c) Peat pandan plants used as woven raw materials; (d) Pandan strands that have been dried and colored
(Source: Wahyudi, 2018 & <https://en.pantaugambut.id/insights/preserving-the-mystical-power-of-pandan-weaving>)

The Surinamese Javanese community is quite familiar with the Art of weaving because one of the purposes of Sana Budaya / VHJI is to introduce this culture by assisting people who want to learn. Besides that, the local wisdom of the indigenous Surinamese Indians also has a tradition of weaving.

Pudji Utomo, a craft artist, tries to introduce weaving art to the Surinamese Javanese community by introducing weaving art motifs from Indonesia and using pandanus plant media in weaving art.

Suriname is also where Pandanus plants grow, and the Surinamese Javanese also call it so. In Indonesia, not all pandanus can be used as handicraft art; only some are of Sea Pandanus or Pandanus Samak as people call it; in scientific language, this plant is named (*Pandanus odoratissimus L.F.*). Pudji Utomo and Tri Wahyudi also introduced knowledge like this as an introduction to materials before carving and weaving art because Javanese people rarely use all materials to create Art.

The wood carving and weaving art learning program in Suriname is a record of cultural diplomacy efforts carried out for the first time. Furthermore, this is also the first time since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries that the Government of the Republic of Indonesia has sent two handicraft art teachers to present and teach cultural arts in the form of carving and weaving art from here it can be seen that the aesthetic values of handicraft art in the local wisdom of Javanese culture can be taught to Surinamese Javanese who have never set foot on the land of their ancestors. Moreover, of course, the value of the local wisdom of Javanese cultural arts is expected to be accepted. It can be an identity that can add pride to a nation's self-identity in the diaspora in search of its identity in art and culture.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The conclusion of the introduction of Carving and Weaving Art is that the need to find identity in the form of traditional artworks for the Javanese community of Suriname is very important because by knowing traditional art, they can get to know their cultural identity amid the intersection of multicultural cultures in Suriname.

Cultural identity, as a cultural force, plays a pivotal role in shaping a harmonious communal society. The preservation of local wisdom, passed down by our ancestors, is not just a marker of our identity but also a cornerstone in our journey towards a civilized society. The recommendation that can be given to the community is that cultural identity in a person is very important in the midst of a modern society that always tries to orient itself to Western culture.

The community in Suriname is one example of a Western society that still adopts Eastern or local culture brought by its ancestors so that local wisdom values can still be maintained.

The challenge for any community that becomes a diaspora is the sense of alienation experienced when they are far from their ancestral roots. The Javanese community in Suriname acknowledges this struggle, as they are a minority group. Consequently, the issue of identity becomes a continuous quest, where the values of local wisdom from their ancestors serve as a foundation for maintaining an ongoing affirmation of a Javanese identity (Meel, 2011) within the multicultural context of Suriname.

Learning the arts of carving and weaving is an integral part of Javanese culture in Indonesia, deeply embedded in their society for generations. This artistry is reflected in everyday items, such as the 'tampah' used for cleaning rice seeds and the 'caping' that farmers traditionally wear in the fields. Additionally, carved ornaments have historically adorned the interiors of Javanese homes. Unfortunately, these cultural expressions are rarely found within the Javanese community in Suriname.

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This paper is dedicated to the development of the archipelago's crafts in Indonesia, as well as thanks to the government and the Non-Governmental Organization in Suriname, because without the excellent cooperation of these two organizations, the cultural arts teaching program would not run smoothly in Suriname, in this case from the government agency in Suriname represented by Directorate Cultuur and from the non-governmental organization represented by VHJI (Vereniging Herdenking Javaanse Imigratie) Sana Budaya, which provides a place to process to introduce Indonesian art in Suriname until it makes an art exhibition and is involved in the Indofair event which is an annual event of the Indonesian government to showcase Indonesian creative industry products so that people in the South American region can widely recognize Indonesia. Also, the Indonesian Embassy in Paramaribo and the PPSDK Language Agency provided recommendations so that the diaspora community in Suriname could identify the archipelago's crafts.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The writing in this paper contributes to the scientific field of visual arts. It can be applied in craft studies to understand the material tools and materials used, technical knowledge of the art of carving and weaving, or the art of archipelago crafts that can be learned by anyone who does not only exist in Indonesia. As part of the global community, it is our responsibility to preserve and promote the art of archipelago crafts. One of the things that can be learned is that the archipelago ornament can be used as a form of art object in the diversity of art ornaments in the world, and also an understanding that materials derived from nature in Indonesia can be further developed to create a work of art that has identity and can utilize materials from nature that are environmentally friendly, such as teak wood and pandan leaves that can be found daily around us.

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