

Community-Based Industry in Indonesia: Cultural Identity or Responsibility

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SUMMARY

This paper aims to analyse the development of community-based industry in Indonesia from the perspective of design field. As we know, Indonesia is the archipelago of 13,667 islands with the array of ethnics (more than 300 ethnics with different culture), each with its own cultural identity and natural resources. Indonesia has great potential to be nation achieving the model of community-based industry in facing the globalization. Unfortunately, this potentiality is hampered by two reasons. First, the nation historical reason –Indonesia had been colonized for centuries– which brings Indonesian people have no tradition to developing industry based on the culture of innovation; generally they are just accustomed to copying, modifying or order-based producing the cultural objects. The second is the politic-economical reason, which makes the nature of industrial development in Indonesia, has been dominated by trading activity, not industrialization.

In the era of economic recovery after the currency crisis in 1998, Indonesian government initiate to more strengthening of the small-medium enterprises as well as stimulating the existence of community-based industry in order to raising the share contribution of industrial and tourism sector. In this process, it is imperative to take the development of community-based industry in in-depth consideration, not merely from the economic perspective, but also from the perspective of design field. Community-based industry can be defined as industry producing product based on the cultural characteristic, natural resources, and hereditary craftsmanship of particular community or ethnic. Its growth is very reluctant to be influenced by global market ideology, and therefore needs in-depth consideration. In the design term, the growth of community-based industry in relating to the resulted product always brings the dilemmatic issues up to surface: between the cultural identity and moral responsibility.

This paper indicates four aspects of design development to be obtained in evaluating the existence of community-based industry, which are: (1) Spiritual aspect for the value of “goodness”, (2) Ideology for “usability”, (3) Material for “pleasure”, and (4) Activity for “justability”. By grouping these aspects into the premise of identity and responsibility, the community-based industry can be divided into two semantic types: (a) indigenous (based on communal religious beliefs and way of living), and (b) extraneous

industry (adapting the new ideology and materials). Recently, the majority of community-based industry in Indonesia tends to be dragged towards the second type.

1. INTRODUCTION: INDUSTRY IN INDONESIA

Known to anthropologists and naturalists as “The Malay Archipelago”, Indonesia archipelago has 13,667 islands strewn across 5,120 kms of tropical seas. The array of peoples, languages, customs, and material cultures is astounding for living here are over hundred distinct ethnic groups, each with its own cultural identity, who together speak a total of more 300 mutually unintelligible languages. Indonesian culture has a long history and was syncretically formed through the cultural influences of Hindu, Buddhism, Islam as well as Dutch colonialism. Among five main islands (Sumatera, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua), the island of Java formed a chain of ports on the trade routes between the Middle East, India, and China for many centuries.

Indonesia has set forth the development objective for the industrial sector as its structural reforms through accelerated growth, increased added value, creation of employment opportunities and export promotion. To achieve the target growths, one of the following policies is to strengthening of small and medium-sized enterprises, including the promotion of community industries producing craft product. It is expected to play an important role in the development of lagging regions.

According to the national economic data, before the currency crisis in 1998, Indonesian’s economic growth rate was an average between 6,95%, and the non-oil gas sector 10,71%, raising the manufacture sector’s share in GDP to 25,0% in 1997. The industrial sector was expected to contribute to economic development by emphasizing the industrialization process aiming at higher value added and international competitiveness in place of previous reliance on low labor costs and natural resources.

But in 1998, when the currency crisis surges Indonesian economic growth, Rupiah (Indonesian currency) devalued rapidly at the lowest level. The crisis brought the fast growing economy into a halt and a recession. In 1998, nominal GDP recorded negative growth, totaling US\$214,6 billion (US\$1,066 per capita). The currency crisis in turn brought political situation of Indonesia to the era of political reformation and economic recovery. And since reformation period (1998-present), Indonesian GDP has been growing in approximately 2-4% each year.

Geographically, import substitutive and export-oriented industries primarily concentrate in Java, particularly Jakarta and its vicinities. Another industrial concentration is observed in Surabaya. In contrast to Java, other main islands mainly accommodates industry processing natural resources or agricultural products: oil, natural gas, and lumber in Kalimantan and Papua; agricultural products, lumber, and oil and natural gas in Sumatra; and processing of agricultural products in Sulawesi.

However in Indonesia –as a melting pot of various distinct cultures– diverse craft products are made in various areas or communities, using a wide variety of materials (e.g. wood, rattan, textile, leather, ceramics, etc.). It is imperative to identifying and classifying the ‘nature’ of their existence to obtain a development strategy and to maintain their sustainability. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse their semantic characteristics from design perspective. And as limitation of the analysis, four representative community-based industry existed in Java island will be studied, which are: (1) Basketry industry: *Kampung Naga* at Tasikmalaya, West Java; (2) Traditional textile (*Batik*) industry at Yogyakarta-Surakarta, Mid Java; (3) Rattan industry at Cirebon, West Java, and; (4) Woodcarving industry at Jepara, Mid Java. All of them produce craft based on community’s peculiarity that has been inherited from early times but have different nature in their design development, caused by the interference of global market ideology. There are community which still preserve their peculiarity in producing traditional craft products, but to some extent, there are also the community which getting fully involved in contemporary craft, or moreover, just produce souvenirs.

Some design schools have a great role in promoting and developing craft industry in academic sector. But to more uplifting the share contribution of craft industries in professional sector, some support organizations, either government or non-governmental agencies, have been involving to promote the importance of design and coordinate policies. Government (e.g. Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Cooperatives and Small-Medium Enterprises) have established sections in relation to design promotion, which the important one among them is Indonesia Design Center, to provide information and design consultancy. But because of lack of full-time personnel engaged and inadequacy in operational budget, this center is still facing difficulties to active initiate their own programs.

2. COMMUNITY-BASED INDUSTRY IN DESIGN TERM

Design is a broad field of making and planning disciplines which has a wide range of object studies in every cultural entity: from components level to products level, and from systems level to community level.

From design perspective, community-based industry can be defined as industry producing product based on the cultural resources (e.g. symbol and images derived from communal religious beliefs, peculiar behavior, and prevalent values) and/or natural resources and/or hereditary craftsmanship of particular community. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the fundamental discourse on community-based industry is all about culture.

In the design term, the dynamic entity of culture could be perceived from two approaches: The first is that culture as an entity in the level of ideas, such as: symbolic belief, world views and ideology (anthropologist approach), and; the second is that culture as an entity in more concretely, the level of attitude, such as: activities, object and

its visual or physical performance. These two approaches are endless in their subtle differences, but they may be drawn into two lines with each tip representing the fundamental cultural aspect, such as: spiritual, ideological, activity, and material aspect. These aspects could be used as premises in analysing the existence of community-based industry (*Figure 1*).

Spiritual aspect consists of community's religious beliefs, symbolic myths, and prevalent transcendental ideas. This aspect targets the value of "goodness" and affirms the proper place of human beings in the spiritual and natural order of the world. The Javanese farmer communities believe that Dewi Sri, goddess of rice and fertility, gives her blessing to their rice fields, keep it safe and fertile from time to time.

Right cultivation of rice straw and keenly devotion in the making of related tools are communal efforts to be valued as "good" in commitment.

Ideological aspect grounds in the agency behind action; it is such system of thinking and intention behind the activity. This aspect supports human beings in the accomplishment of their intentions in obtaining the value of "useful". For example, the implicit statement "economy is our destiny" of capitalism would make the nature of particular communal industry bias to the economic purpose more than moral purpose. This situation could be shown in particular community-based industry used to imitate good-selling products for market purpose.

Activity aspect concerns to the equitable relation between human beings and their environment in achieving the value of "just". This aspect emphasizes that the term culture is not only a state expressed in an ideology or a body of doctrines; rather, it is also an activity. The right job distribution based on community's social hierarchy or gender in running their industry, or the implementation of symbiotic concept in cultivating rice straw in agricultural community are examples of this aspect.

While material aspect concerns to the physical and psychological needs of human beings in targeting the value of "pleasure". This aspect is usually to be perceived as the aspect of visual appearance or physical performance with its psychological perception. To some extent, this aspect is also assumed as a set in opposition to the moral responsibility. The products categorized as souvenir can be taken for instance, they are often appreciated as pleasurable object, meet with the need of foreigner, but abandon the essential cultural meaning of the object.

From the onset, it could be obtained in our referential thinking, that the relation between spiritual and activity aspect embodies the premise of moral responsibility towards the communal way of living. There are always relevant reasons to explain the behavioral activities of, and the manifested product's characteristics of such community by referring their religious myths and their symbolic system, such as: their way of building the dwelling is based on their cosmological myth ('center/periphery' concept), they establish conventions in coordinating communal self-economic sustainability by differentiating product for needs and wants, their distribution of work is based on their

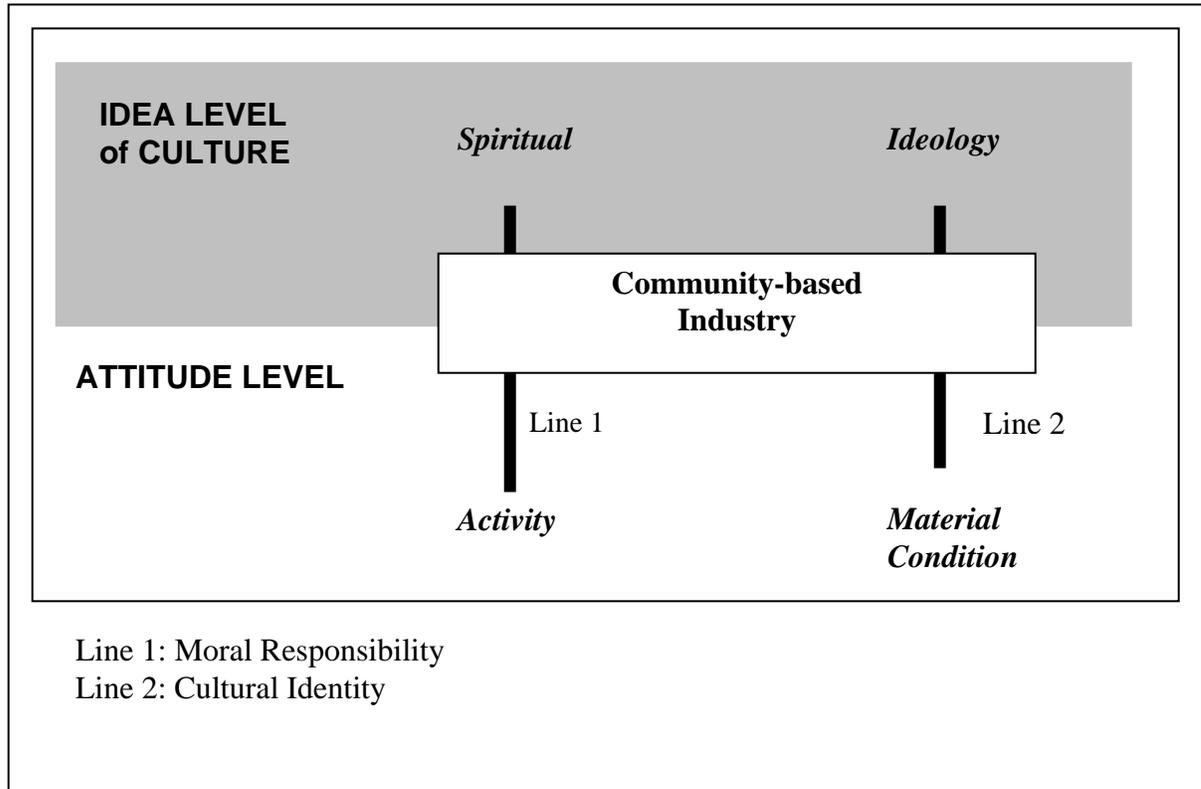


Figure 1: Design and Cultural Aspects of Community-based Industry

social hierarchy, the visual appearance of their products is based on the symbolic function, they usually make a living ‘from-by-and for’ themselves, and so on. This community, furthermore, could be term as “indigenous community”.

While the relation of ideological and material aspect could provide as a main premise of cultural identity towards the communal way of living. Cultural identity is a dynamic entity; it is never entirely fixed because it consists ideas which are produced, circulated and exchanged through different times, different ideologies, and the progression of material invention. The systemic ideas coming from the ‘outside’ such as capitalism, modernism, technologism have been proven that could significantly change the communal tradition of product making, from community-oriented to profit-oriented concept. These such community could be term as “extraneous community”.

3. INDIGENOUS AND EXTRANEIOUS COMMUNITY

Four representative community-based industries in Java have been selected to be analysed under category of indigenous and extraneous, which are: (a) Basketry community at Kampung Naga, West Java, (b) Traditional textile (*batik*) community in Mid-Java, (c) Rattan furniture community at Cirebon, West Java, and (d) Woodcarving community at Jepara, Mid-Java.

3.a. Community of *Kampung Naga*: Embryonic Basketry Community

Basically, the people of *Kampung Naga* live as rice-cultivated community. But people living in this area have an inexhaustible supply of useful plant products from sugar palms, pandanus, coconut palms, rattan palm vines, and reeds. They used to facilitate their own use with self-made basketry elements ranging from simple container, carrier-bag, rice baskets, ceremonial equipments to house elements, such as: panel, roof, door and sitting mats. Their keenly devotion for generations on basketry resulted a rich variant of weaving techniques and inspired their surrounding community in Tasikmalaya region, West Java.

This community remain consist of 326 families living in 110 houses. The uniqueness of *Kampung Naga* is that in spite of its proximity to modern society it has retained its traditional customs over the centuries. They are not far from the urban centers that dot West Java in Indonesia, but villagers in *Kampung Naga* at first glance seem to be preserving a way of life their ancestors led for generations. Like generations before them, they work their farms and share the produce among themselves. Chemical fertilizer is taboo and slash-and-burn land clearing is strictly prohibited. They are also so averse to modern convenience that they also shun electricity, as well as any electronic goods or gadgets.

Despite the availability of modern construction materials, families use bamboo to build their homes and dried coconut leaves to roof their dwellings, which are similar to one another in design and size.

To the people of *Kampung Naga*, the rules of life handed down by their elders are sacred. All this seemed to work until the State Forestry Corporation, ruled in 1997 that *Kampung Naga*'s protected area belonged to the government. Apart from losing their sacred land, the villagers of this picturesque enclave are about to lose their privacy as well — the government has taken the first steps toward turning their village into a tourist area. But this community is consistently retaining their communal values towards differentiation of own-used (internal/sacred) and foreigner-used (external/profane) products.

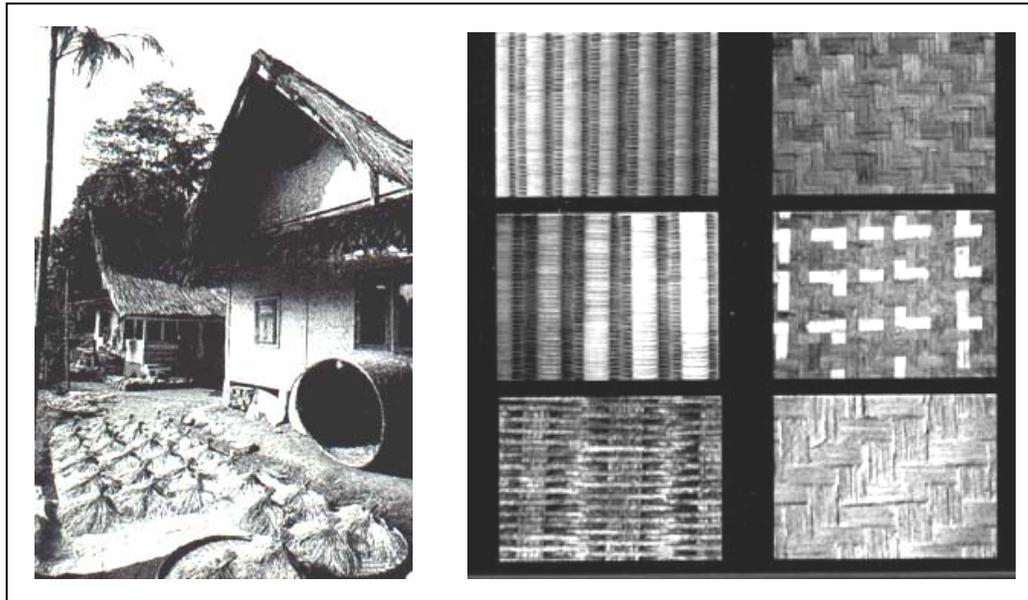


Figure 2: Kampung Naga, Embryonic Community for Basketry Industry

3.b. Traditional Textile (*Batik*) Community at Yogyakarta-Surakarta, Mid-Java

Batik is generally thought of as the most quintessentially Indonesian textile. The patterns to be dyed into the cloth are drawn with a *canting*, a wooden ‘pen’ fitted with a reservoir for hot-liquid wax. In batik workshops, circles of women sit working at cloths draped over frames, and periodically replenish their supply of wax by dipping their *canting* into a central vat. Some draw directly on the cloth from memory; other wax over faint charcoal lines. This method of drawing patterns in wax of on fine machine-woven cotton was practiced as a form of meditation by the female courtiers of Mid-Java. Traditionally, batik is produced only by women. In the 19th century, the application of waxed patterns with a large copper stamp saved the batik industry from competition with cheap printed European cloth. The semi-industrial nature of stamped batik work allows it to be performed by men.

The culture of Mid or Central Java is suffused with a mixture of Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist and Javanese mystical traditions. The inland royal court cities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta are the twin epicentres of this culture, and it is here that naturally dyed batik with the characteristic colours of *soga* brown and indigo blue is produced. At the early stage, batik motifs recall characters from the Hindu epics, plants, animals, and sea creatures. But in the 1960s, some contemporary batik designers attempted to meet the competitive demands of foreigners by experimentation of colouring and ornamentation



Figure 3: Situation of Batik Industry in Mid Java

techniques. The community began to diversify the utilization of batik, not limited to the style cloth, but also to the ‘gimmick’ souvenirs, such as: key-holders, batik sandals, tourist-hat, and so on. The sacredness function of batik initially expressed from its motifs, colours and techniques gradually disappeared.

3.c Rattan Furniture Industry in Cirebon, West Java

In Indonesia, rattan is harvested in the jungles of Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Sumatra. Trading has been mainly concentrated on the island of Java. Over time Cirebon established itself as the rattan trading community and subsequent rattan industry.

Until 1987, almost all rattan was exported as a raw material to overseas markets and only a small portion of lower quality rattan remained in Cirebon. This was turned into furniture and house-hold products by small home-industries. During that time Indonesia only exported finished rattan goods, with relatively simple designs, on a small scale. But in 1987 Indonesia's government decided to stop exporting raw rattan, demand for finished rattan furniture soared and gave an impetus to Cirebon's rattan Industry. It was some while before larger factories were established and even today many rattan furniture exporters outsource their production to home industries and act only as intermediaries.

The vast majority of the community are involved in some type of income-generating activity, no matter how limited in scope. Young people in the village admit to a sense of shame and embarrassment if they are unemployed. Besides working as farmers cultivating their own land, or as farm laborers, many people in this community are also employed in other economic activities.

It is very interesting to note that for more than a decade, an increasing number of people are being employed in the rattan industry, both in the rattan factories, or with rattan factory sub-contractors. Sub-contractors make a variety of rattan products for the

large local factories on a piece-work basis. Employment in the rattan industry among the people of Cirebon can be divided into three categories: those workers who are employed in the rattan industry outside the village, especially in neighboring district; those operating as rattan sub-contractors within the village; and those who are the employees of these sub-contractors.

Obviously, the rattan industry has improved the social and economic conditions of the Buyut community. Nearly all of the young people of working age in the village are able to find employment in this industry. Even school children and housewives are employed as daily-hire workers or piece-workers in the sub-contracting enterprises, working from their own homes. Since almost all of the residents are involved in either the rattan industry and or in other different kinds of economic activities, many respondents, including the Head of the Village, believe that this has led to a decline in the incidence of outward migration and social conflict within the community.



Figure 4: Rattan Furniture Industry in Cirebon, West Java

The expansion of the rattan industry has also had an impact on attitudes towards education within the village community, but two quite contradictory effects can be identified. On the one hand, the rattan industry has provided families in Cirebon with the resources to enable their children to pursue their education at a higher level, yet on the other hand, the very existence of the rattan industry, and the job opportunities that it provides, may be encouraging some teenagers to drop out of school prematurely since they can still be guaranteed of a steady income.

3.d Woodcarving Industry at Jepara, Mid-Java

Jepara is known for its woodcarving and furniture industries. It is located in the northern coastal area of Semarang, Mid-Java. Jepara is also a historic and important centre for a numerous types of carving. At the turn of century, R.A. Kartini, daughter of the Regent of Jepara and an early feminist, nationalist and author, was passionate in her

patronage of local craftsmen, and encouraged them to develop small, saleable products such as the little boxes, buttons, chess set, and picture frames. Unpainted screens, and duplicated and modified European classic furnitures in turn are also carved in teak, mahogany, and ebony in this region.

In recent development, the export of furniture from Jepara, Central Java, reached a value of US\$250 million in the 2001, although most of the added value of such export activities was enjoyed by foreign entities. In Jepara, there are thousands of small and medium scale craftsmen and tens of large-scale foreign entrepreneurs. In one month, the export of furniture from this region reaches 1,200 containers with a value of around US\$20,000, which, for the most part, is enjoyed by these foreign players. The foreign players, entered freely and built factories, and the government viewed this in a positive light as a means to transfer technology to the local businesses.



Figure 5: Woodcarving Industry in Jepara Mid-Java

Thus, among them, it could be obtained that: the case of Kampung Naga (a) could be categorized as indigenous community-based industry; the *batik* community (b) is on shifting process, from indigenous to extraneous community; and both rattan and wooden furniture community are almost identified themselves as extraneous community.

4. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED INDUSTRY

Identity and responsibility frame a discussion about the two semantic types of community-based industry. Both are closely related and could not be separated each other. Some design intellectuals may argue that the formulation of cultural identity is one of moral responsibilities of designer. That is a logical argument, but it is necessary to be also considered that in developing a community-based industry, premise of moral responsibility (in-depth consideration on spiritual-behavioral-and environmental aspect)

should be taken as priority so that the reflected identity could be integrated with those spiritual-behavioral-and environmental aspect, not merely ideological useful or material pleasure.

The ultimate role of design field in the development of community-based industry is to conceive the products of the community which express and necessarily reconcile their communal values concerning what is “good”, “useful”, “just”, and “pleasurable”. Therefore, it is imperative in the era of globalization, some design intellectuals and regional planners have to begin to shift their work, not only in the phase of images and physical factor of product, but should place design thinking explicitly in the context of strategic planning. Development of community-based industry would reposition design as disciplines of:

- (a) Communication: which concerns to inventing and formulating sign, symbols and images.
- (b) Construction: which is related to the physical objects
- (c) Strategic Planning: which includes deciding activities, human services and functions.
- (d) Systemic Integration: which concerns to the evaluation phase of systems, environments, ideas, and values.

The rich potential cultural resources to develop community-based industry that acknowledges the variety of religious beliefs, behavioral activities, natural resources, and peculiar craftsmanship provide a great basis to organize design workshops in particular communities. Indeed, design is not limited to sketches, and modeling but encompasses several evaluative process, such as: spiritual, ideological, socio-economic activities, and material condition. The design workshop referred here emphasizes the phase of generating ideas, as an early phase within the whole design process which becomes the basis for stimulating new cultural products derived from the community peculiarity in more innovative forms of representation. Therefore, the alternative method based on the field of product semantics in searching cultural characteristic of Community-based industry would be very of useful to be implemented. In this phase, local craftsmen, intellectuals, and community figures, either individually or groups would be asked to:

- (1) determine the theme of product to be developed;
- (2) collect their folklore or tales, or myths (referential level) which they can serve as the kind of inspiration to be drawn into various symbolic schemes;
- (3) classify their draft ideas into three-codes of signification (signification level), which are: iconic, indexical and symbolic concept, through metaphoric and metonymic appreciation;
- (4) transforming the classified signification into several expression adjustable to the product’s affordance, and;
- (5) configuring those separated visual expressions into the whole form (color, structure, technique, ornamentation) through understandable sketches and models.

The implementation of design workshop with the use of this semantic method would be significantly encourage innovative product of every community-based industry.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper, I would like to say that it is important to use “product semantic design” approach or “design history and culture” as perspective, to build an appropriate and sustainable community based industry. Generally, this perspective can be applied in every countries, however, we still have to pay attention to the specific cases, let me say Indonesia. Historically speaking, Indonesia has no tradition of “innovation culture”. Indonesian people have been living in a domination of “trading activities” which I can say: ignoring the invention process. With that in mind, I advise that the semantic design and design history and culture should be considered important to be acknowledged.

Through the analysis of four representative community-based industry on the onset, it could be obtained that there are two types of community, which are:

- (1) Indigenous Community which is still retaining the premise of moral responsibility in their way of living. Their behavioral activities and the manifested product’s characteristics of such community derived from their religious myths and their symbolic system. They establish conventions in coordinating communal self-economic sustainability by differentiating product for own-use and foreigner-use; they used to make a living ‘from-by-and for’ themselves and produce religious ritual and traditional craft products.
- (2) Extraneous Community which take the dynamic nature of cultural identity as main premise in their way of living. They are adaptive to the new ideas which are produced, circulated and exchanged through different times, different ideologies, and the progression of material invention. Usually, these such community produce contemporary craft and market-oriented craft products (for export purpose and tourism)

Both of them are exist in recent industrial situation in Indonesia. Moreover, considering that the influence of global market ideology is getting greater, the majority of community-based industry in Indonesia tends to be dragged towards the second type (extraneous community-based industry).

The ultimate role of design field in the development of community-based industry is to conceive the products of the community which express and necessarily reconcile their communal values concerning what is “good”, “useful”, “just”, and “pleasurable”. Therefore, it is imperative in the era of globalization, some design intellectuals and regional planners have to begin to shift their work, not only in the phase of images and

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