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Revitalization of Dayak Ngaju Cultural Heritage through the Development of Traditional Mandau Weapon Design with Djata Motif

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Endah Yusma Pratiwi^{1*}; Nawung Asmoro Girindraswari²;
Marrisa Aulia Mayangsari³; Andi Arie Astuti⁴

University of Palangka Raya, Indonesia ¹²³⁴

*Contributor Email: endahyusmapratiwi@fkip.upr.ac.id

Abstract

Mandau is a cultural heritage of the Dayak community in the form of a traditional weapon. In recent times, there has been a distortion in the understanding of Mandau, particularly among younger generations, who often perceive it merely as a tool or sharp-edged weapon. Such a perspective needs to be corrected by reintroducing this cultural heritage to society. This study aims to formulate efforts for the revitalization of the Dayak Ngaju cultural heritage through the development of the traditional Mandau weapon design incorporating the Djata motif. It examines the historical and aesthetic aspects of Mandau while integrating the Djata motif as a symbol of protection and strength. This study employs a qualitative research method. Data collection techniques include interviews with Mandau craftsmen, Dayak visual artists, traditional art preservationists, and the general public. In addition to interviews, observations were conducted on Mandau collections in museums and during the Mandau-making process, as well as a literature review by analyzing relevant writings on the topic. The results showed that the development of Mandau with the Djata motif represents a concrete effort in revitalizing the Dayak Ngaju cultural heritage. Each part of the Mandau holds symbolic meaning, just as the Djata motif carries philosophical significance. The integration of the Djata motif into the Mandau design has the potential to strengthen cultural values and enrich the traditional visual arts heritage of the Dayak Ngaju.

Keyword: Cultural Revitalization, Djata motif, Dayak, Mandau,

Abstrak

Mandau merupakan warisan budaya masyarakat Dayak berupa senjata tradisional. Saat ini terjadi pembiasan pemahaman tentang Mandau khususnya oleh generasi muda bahwa Mandau seringkali hanya dipandang sebagai alat atau senjata tajam. Pandangan semacam ini perlu diluruskan dengan memperkenalkan kembali warisan budaya kepada masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan upaya revitalisasi warisan budaya Dayak Ngaju melalui pengembangan desain senjata tradisional Mandau dengan motif Djata. Penelitian ini mengkaji aspek historis dan estetika Mandau, serta mengintegrasikan elemen motif Djata

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sebagai simbol perlindungan dan kekuatan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan teknik wawancara kepada pengrajin Mandau, seniman perupa Dayak, pelestari seni tradisi, dan masyarakat umum. Selain wawancara juga observasi koleksi Mandau di museum dan pada proses pembuatan Mandau, serta studi literatur dengan menelaah tulisan yang relevan dengan topik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan Mandau dengan motif Djata merupakan wujud konkret dari upaya revitalisasi warisan budaya Dayak Ngaju. Mandau memiliki makna pada setiap bagiannya sama halnya dengan Motif Djata yang juga memiliki makna secara filosofis. Motif Djata pada desain Mandau memiliki potensi untuk menguatkan nilai-nilai kebudayaan serta memperkaya khazanah seni rupa tradisional Dayak Ngaju.

Kata Kunci: Revitalisasi budaya; Mandau; Dayak; Motif djata

Introduction

Cultural heritage is an important asset in building a community's identity. The Dayak Ngaju tribe in Central Kalimantan has a variety of cultural riches, one of which is the traditional Mandau weapon full of spiritual and philosophical values. Cultural heritage serves as a channel that conveys messages from the past to the present and future generations, providing insights into the values, traditions, and identity of a society (Effendhie, 2019). In the midst of globalization and modernization, the existence of the Mandau has slowly begun to fade, and there is a bias in understanding among the younger generation that the Mandau is usually considered only a sharp weapon (Yuwono, 2022). Therefore, one effort to preserve this cultural heritage is to revitalize Mandau with a more relevant design approach, including the integration of traditional motifs such as Djata. Anxiety about the weakening of local culture will not occur if the inherited culture is not allowed to live passively and the values of this culture must be studied and given new enthusiasm according to the times, or in this case, a creation that can give a new soul is needed (Alfan, 2012)

The Djata motif is a symbol of a mythical animal in the Dayak tribe's beliefs, often associated with strength, protection, and courage. Applying this motif to the Mandau design will not only strengthen the Dayak cultural identity but also expand its aesthetic reach in a modern context. Previous research on the Mandau weapon has been conducted before. Hery Santosa and Tapip Bahtiar explored this topic in their study titled "Mandau Senjata Tradisional sebagai Pelestari Rupa Lingkungan Dayak". Their research delved into the geographical and socio-cultural conditions of the Dayak community, their religion and beliefs, the components of the Mandau, and traditional arts that support the Mandau (Bahtiar, 2016). Similarly, Basuki Teguh Yuwono examined the Mandau as a cultural identity of the Dayak (Borneo) people.

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His findings discussed the definition and characteristics of the Mandau, its historical development, and its various functions, including spiritual, social, tectonic, aesthetic, and personal functions (Yuwono, 2022). This study, titled "*Revitalizing the Cultural Heritage of Dayak Ngaju through the Development of Mandau Designs with Djata Motifs*", aims to complement previous research by focusing on the development of Mandau designs featuring Djata motifs. It also discusses the symbolic meanings of each part of the Mandau and its commercialization potential. This research is significant as it emphasizes contemporary design aspects combined with local values to enhance the appeal of traditional art in broader markets.

Methods

This study was conducted in the city of Palangka Raya. The choice of location is based on Palangka Raya being a major city in Central Kalimantan where traditional Mandau crafting practices still persist. Additionally, the city often hosts festivals or exhibitions showcasing traditional objects, involving local craftsmen.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature studies. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who meet specific criteria (Sugiyono, 2016). The criteria included individuals with knowledge about the components of the Mandau, its crafting process, the meanings of its parts, Mandau users, and community members both familiar and unfamiliar with the symbolic meanings of the Mandau. Based on these criteria, five informants were chosen: a Mandau craftsman, a Dayak visual artist, a traditional art preserver, and two members of the general public. Interviews were conducted by asking relevant questions and noting key points. Observations involved witnessing the Mandau crafting process and examining Mandau collections at the museum. Literature studies were conducted to complement field data with supporting information.

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman technique, which involves collecting data, sorting data relevant to the research topic, displaying the data, and drawing conclusions (Basrowi, 2008). The researcher gathered data on Dayak motifs found in other cultural artifacts, the components of the Mandau, the meanings of its parts, its functions, and observations of the Mandau crafting process. The collected information was then filtered to focus on data relevant to the research topic. The data was subsequently presented and conclusions were drawn. To ensure

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data validity, the researcher employed triangulation techniques by comparing data from interviews with findings from observations conducted in museums and the homes of Mandau craftsmen, as well as literature studies.

Result and Discussion

Cultural revitalization is a planned effort to ensure that cultural values are understood by their owners and stimulate creativity (Alfan, 2012). In this study, the effort is to create new motifs, such as the Djata motif. Revitalizing Mandau through the development of the Djata motif can provide new meaning to this weapon. Despite the development, the richness of Dayak culture, including Mandau, remains unique and authentic because the inheritance process is carried out from generation to generation (Bahtiar, 2016).

From Pierce's perspective, the Mandau with the Djata motif falls into icons, indexes, and symbols. According to Pierce, something can be categorized as an icon, index, or symbol depending on how it relates to its object (Sánchez-Ovcharov & Suárez, 2024). The Djata motif in the Mandau carving is a crocodile icon, and the carving is also typical of Dayak (index). Then, the motif and several other parts are symbols that have meaning. As an animal that lives in the tropics, the crocodile symbolizes strength, skill, and supernatural powers. In addition, the crocodile also reflects strength, magic, supernatural powers, water, and fertility (Mayasari et al., 2014). The crocodile is also used as a social symbol to remind people to remain strong and able to maintain their traditions and identity amidst the influence of foreign cultures.

The design produced in this study emphasizes the balance between tradition and innovation. Integrating the Djata motif into the Mandau adds visual richness and strengthens the philosophical message. In addition, this design can attract the younger generation's attention, who may be less interested in traditional cultural heritage. With the development of the design, the Mandau can be more accepted as a relevant cultural symbol in the modern era without losing its traditional essence.

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The Process of Creating a Mandau with a Djata Pattern

The creation of a Mandau with a Djata motif involves several important stages:

- a. Initial Design: The process began with research on crocodile iconography in the Dayak Ngaju culture. The crocodile shape and pattern were adapted from traditional Dayak carvings often used in rituals or on other artifacts such as shields and longhouse carvings. This motif design was then translated into ornaments on the Mandau blade and its sheath.



Picture 1 Initial design of the Djata motif

- b. Material Selection: Mandau materials are generally made of selected metals, such as iron or steel, while the sheath is made of ironwood, which is durable and strong. The function of Mandau also influences the choice of material as a weapon and ritual symbol. In terms of the Djata motif, crocodile carvings are often placed on the blade or handle, adding to the weapon's aesthetic and functional value.



Picture 1. Ironwood (*Kayu Ulin*)

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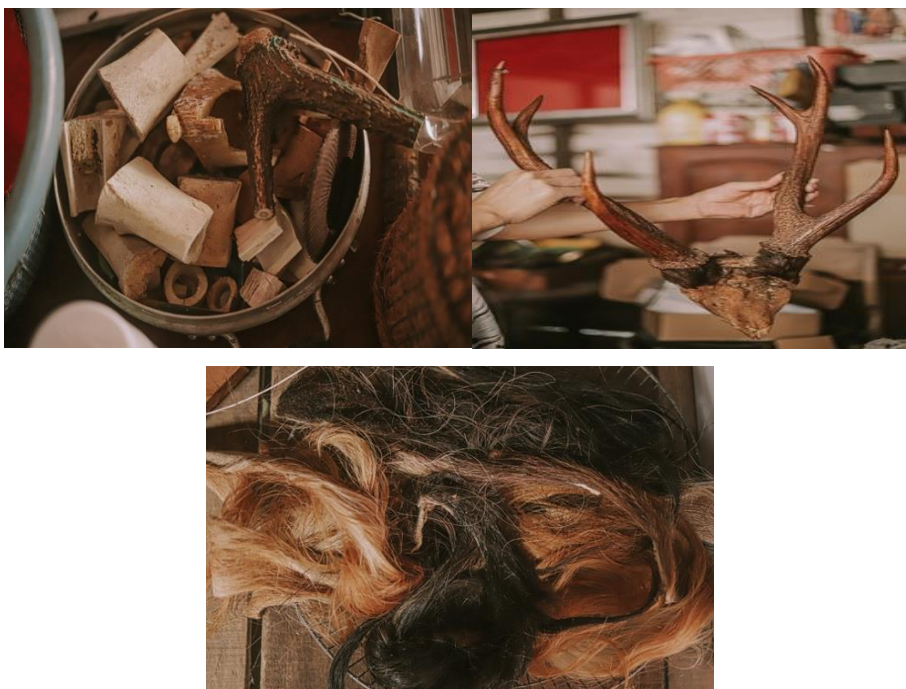
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Picture 2. *Iron Blade*

Mandau is usually made from carved mountain stone iron, while the hilt or handle, called "pulang mandau," is carved from white or black deer antlers but can also be made from mihing wood.

Making a balik mandau from mihing wood begins by soaking the log in the soil, which is soil found in coastal areas. At the tip of the balik mandau, animal fur or human hair is usually added as decoration. Sambun wood sap connects the mandau to its handle, which has strong adhesive power.



Picture 3. *Fur, Bones, and Deer Antlers*

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Picture 4. Materials for Belawit

Engraving Technique: The process of engraving the Djata motif uses traditional carving techniques. Local craftsmen apply hereditary skills to highlight the details of the crocodile motif on the Mandau. The engraving is done carefully so as not to damage the structure of the weapon while keeping the details of the motif clear and meaningful. In some modern versions, finer carving techniques, with the help of modern tools, are used to suit contemporary aesthetic demands.

Wood carving is a visual art characterized by harmonious concave and convex shapes, made from materials such as wood, metal, or other substances. It is inspired by nature, including plants and animals, with motifs serving as the foundation of its creation (Leonaldy et al., 2015). The carvings on the Mandau also have deep meanings, often depicting magical characters and symbols, such as asoq (half-tiger dog ghost), lamantek (blood-sucking leeches), and kambe rawit (creatures from another world). The hilt of the Mandau can be made from materials such as special wood, ivory, bone, horn, or metal. In addition, the weave and sheath of the Mandau have certain symbols and numbers, often equipped with amulets. As a symbol of spiritual power, the Mandau is made according to the character of its owner, equipped with oaths and prayers to protect its owner, and should not be used carelessly in Dayak culture.

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Picture 5. Djata Motif Carving Process

Tempuser Undang is divided into Tempuser Undeng Hatue (for men) and Tempuser Undeng Bawi (for women). The installation of Tempuser Undang, both for men and women, is adjusted to the character of the owner. If the owner is known to be patient, usually three Tempuser Undeng are used, with two Tempuser Undeng Bawi at the top and bottom, and one Tempuser Undeng Hatue in the middle of the kumpang.



Picture 6. Finishing of the Mandau with the Djata Motif

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The development of carvings is not simply made but is full of consideration. To develop carvings, they must meet important requirements, namely that carvings must have new and original iconic motifs with local content, not conflict with strategic plans, and adapt to the times. The design form must strengthen the important elements of the carvings and can provide elements of visual communication (Darmawanto & Qomaruddin, 2019). The production of Mandau today is highly adaptive, especially in the case of contemporary Mandau. The materials and sizes are adjusted to meet specific needs. For example, materials like human hair used for decoration can be replaced with cow tail hair sourced from other regions. The size of the Mandau can also vary, being either small or large depending on the requirements. This contrasts with Mandau before the 20th century, which was also used for *mengayau* (headhunting). Historically, the more people killed with a Mandau, the more powerful it was believed to become (Darmadi, 2016).

Philosophical and Symbolic Values in the Design of the Djata Patterned Mandau

Understanding culture means understanding the meanings, values, and symbols utilized by a community (Dharsono (Sony Kartika) et al., 2010). The application of the Djata motif in the Mandau design is not only aesthetic but also philosophical. Mandau, as a traditional weapon, has a symbolic role in protecting the Dayak community, just like the crocodile that protects its waters. Crocodiles, which are considered guardians of nature and protectors of society, are symbols of strength and self-confidence. In ritual use, Mandau with the Djata motif is often considered a medium of communication with ancestral spirits, where crocodiles are considered spiritual guardians and protectors. Motif Djata ini tidak digambarkan dalam bentuk buaya asli tetapi hanya mirip, hal ini karena “Basaluh” atau menjelma (Baboe, 2018)

By carving the Djata motif on the blade and sheath of the Mandau, the craftsman symbolically instilled the animal's protective and aggressive nature into the weapon. This reflects the identity of the Dayak warrior, who is tough and friendly with the surrounding nature. According to one informant, Djata is a creature from the underwater world that is associated with a crocodile or can be considered a manifestation of a crocodile. In Dayak tradition, if someone is killed by a crocodile, the crocodile must be killed through a special ritual performed by a *pangaleran* (crocodile shaman) (Widen, 2023). This ritual aims to uphold justice, where only the guilty crocodile will be targeted, while innocent crocodiles are allowed to live to maintain the balance of nature (Widen, 2023). Therefore, it is not an

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issue to use the Djata motif, which is associated with crocodiles, on the Mandau, as crocodiles themselves hold significance in Dayak mythology. The Djata motif can be considered a new addition to the Mandau, as interviews with craftsmen revealed that the usual motifs carved on Mandau include Lamantek, Tambun, Bajakah Kalalawit, and Kambe Rawit.



Picture 7. *Kumpang Mandau and Langgeu Puai*

Belawit on Mandau refers to decorative elements in the form of strands or weaves attached to the hilt or sheath of Mandau. Usually made of natural fibers, hair, or other materials such as tree bark, belawit has both aesthetic and symbolic functions. This decoration often indicates the status of the Mandau owner and can also be considered a symbol of protection or magical power. In addition to being a decoration, belawit can add spiritual value to the Mandau, especially if paired with magical objects such as those often found on traditional Dayak weapons. In some cases, belawit is also used to indicate that the Mandau has a special meaning, for example used in traditional ceremonies or for war.



Picture 8. *Belawit Mandau*

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The Mandau knot is not made carelessly; in the knot, there is a key knot, which, for the author, is a three-dimensional tattoo. This key knot functions as part of the "science of subduing" which is believed to be able to weaken, lock movements, and paralyze opponents. Weaving the key knot also has its own rules and names. In this Mandau knot, magical objects are also often inserted, such as manang wood or the like. In addition to the key knot, the Mandau used in war is usually equipped with "Peteng Penyang". Penyang, or amulet, can be wood, stone, small oil bottles, animal fangs, shells, statues, and even human skulls. The Dayak people believe these objects to have magical powers to raise the spirit of war, eliminate fear, ward off disaster, poison, and disturbances from spirits, and are also used for healing.



Picture 9. *Buhul kunci*



Picture 10. *Cangkang kerang*

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Picture 11. *Ikui/ekor*

In the context of war or defense, the Mandau with the Djata motif gives a fighting spirit to its owner, like the crocodile Picture that is alert and aggressive in guarding its territory. This philosophy is combined with the nature of the Mandau as a tool that symbolizes the balance between strength and wisdom in its use. The Mandau is a sacred weapon because it can protect everyone and their community from enemy attacks or disturbances from evil creatures (Pranoto et al., 2023). Although the Mandau is considered a sacred weapon, there are versions of the Mandau intended solely for decoration or as ordinary weapons. In the context of commercial trade, the crafting of Mandau does not require any special rituals (Bobiro Harianto, Emi Roslinda, 2022).

Social Acceptance and Modern Adaptation

The development of the Mandau with the Djata motif received a positive response from the Dayak Ngaju community, especially because this motif strengthens their cultural identity. Many traditional craftsmen have begun to incorporate this motif into their work to maintain ancestral values while following modern aesthetic trends.

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Picture 12. Mandau Product with Djata Motif

In addition, the adaptation of Mandau with Djata motifs is also accepted by the younger generation of Dayaks, who are interested in understanding and preserving their cultural heritage. By combining traditional elements and design innovations, Mandau with Djata motifs is now also an attractive product for the art market and ethnographic collections, both locally and internationally. Quite surprising data occurred in 1980-1985 when Mandau was taken out of Kalimantan and became a highly sought-after antique, even Javanese (especially Solo and Jogja), Balinese, Sumatran (especially Palembang and Jambi), Malaysian, Dutch, French, American, and German people brought many of this mandaus. (Yuwono, 2014). This is in line with Iwan's writing that over time, some Mandaus were also used as decorations and for dancing, although the Mandaus that were considered sacred still existed (Pranoto et al., 2023). Even now, Mandau is in demand not only by the people of Kalimantan but also by people outside Kalimantan for decoration. Moreover, with the advancement of technology, social media promotion is easy. From this, it can be observed that there has been a shift in the function of the Mandau, extending into decorative purposes. According to Widia, there are two types of Mandau: the first is used for ceremonies and warfare, while the second is typically utilized for everyday purposes (Widia, 2019).

Implications for the Preservation of Traditional Culture and Arts

Creating the Mandau with the Djata motif is one of the concrete steps in preserving the Dayak Ngaju culture. Through this innovation, traditional values are maintained and adapted to the times' development. The development of the Mandau design with the Djata

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motif allows for inter-generational dialogue, where ancestral culture remains valued and relevant in modern life. With this development, the Mandau is not only seen as a traditional artifact but also as a work of art that can attract cross-cultural attention. The increasing popularity of the Mandau with the Djata motif can also contribute to improving the economy of local communities through cultural tourism and traditional art markets. Developing unique local cultural products is one way to explore the cultural diversity of Indonesia. From an anthropological perspective, creative economies and culture are interrelated, as both originate from the boundless creativity of human ideas (Ramdhani, 2020). The artisan community is very open to new ideas, as shown by their desire to adopt new methods of venturing into the industry. They made souvenirs when asked to take on new roles in Mandau (Andry, 2016). According to Marx, freedom can influence humans to fulfill their needs through creativity, allowing them to create products that align with their imagination (Rahmaniah, 2012).

Open-minded thinking provides opportunities for communities, especially Mandau craftsmen, to make the right decisions. They can market their products through social media or directly. Nowadays, social media can be easily used to showcase high-quality videos while simultaneously introducing local culture (Astini et al., 2023). It can also be done through cultural markets, involving the community to explore local potential (Setiawan et al., 2023). Cultural commercialization reflects the community's efforts to balance modernization with the preservation of cultural identity as a source of pride and economic opportunity (Claudea et al., 2024). Unfortunately, tourist locations, which could serve as venues for marketing cultural souvenirs, have not been optimized. For instance, in the Sebangau Tourism Area, the community has yet to provide handicrafts or distinctive items that can be sold to tourists (Rhama, 2020).

Conclusion

The development of Mandau with the Djata (crocodile) motif is a concrete manifestation of the revitalization efforts of Dayak Ngaju's cultural heritage. By combining philosophical, aesthetic, and symbolic values in the Mandau design, the Djata motif has succeeded in enriching the cultural meaning of the traditional weapon. This innovation not only keeps the tradition alive but also provides space for future adaptation so that the Mandau with the Djata motif can continue to develop and be accepted by various groups in society.

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Revitalizing the Dayak Ngaju cultural heritage through the development of the Mandau design with the Djata motif provides an opportunity to preserve a local culture that is increasingly marginalized by modernization. With a combination of tradition and design innovation, the Mandau can continue to exist as a symbol of the strength and identity of the Dayak tribe in the present and future. This study also contributes to enriching the ethnography in the field of design motifs on the Mandau.

This study recommends more collaboration between local craftsmen and contemporary designers to develop Mandau in various modern contexts, such as fine arts, product design, and even fashion, to expand the reach of Dayak culture on the national and international stage. The government should provide opportunities for Mandau craftsmen, such as through free exhibitions or festivals.

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*Endah Yusma Pratiwi; Nawung Asmoro Girindraswari;
Marrisa Aulia Mayangsari; Andi Arie Astuti*

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