

Ancient Furnitures of Mangkunegaran Palace Surakarta (A Study on Style, Aesthetics, and Preservation of Javanese Culture)

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Abstract. Ancient furniture in the form of tables, chairs and cupboards that are more than 50 years old are well preserved as heritages in the Kadipaten Mangkunegaran, a palace in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. These furniture, in the context of science, have not been studied in terms of their style, aesthetics and preservation. The method of this research is qualitative using paradigm interpretation. The findings show that ancient furniture that functioned as seats, tables, and storage are made of teak wood with European-style, namely the Renaissance and Rococo styles because they originated in Europe. This raised a question when associated with the preservation of Javanese culture. After understanding that Javanese culture was formed by the "combination" of various cultures such as native Javanese, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Colonial (European) cultures, it is comprehensible why these furniture are parts of the Javanese culture repertoire that come from Europe. These ancient furniture have become parts of the history of some Javanese people which greatly influenced the development of Javanese culture, especially in Mangkunegaran Palace.

Keywords: *furniture, ancient, style, aesthetics, preservation*

1. INTRODUCTION

When observing the Mangkunegaran Palace in Surakarta, ancient furniture with their own styles, functions and beauty can be found as the filler in the palace interior. Style in this research is the typical forms of an object, from which it can be recognized based on its characteristics [1]. The beauty of ancient furniture can be assessed in relation to its design aesthetics. In design work, elements and principles of a design can be traced. Thus it can be categorized as aesthetics that refers to something measurable [2]. Aesthetics in Javanese culture is strongly influenced by the sense of feelings as a measure variable. Feeling is a combination of ideas that are led by a series of senses and manifested by the senses into various forms [3]. This then became a complementary point of view to the Western aesthetics that choose a more applicable aesthetic elements, such as furniture. Ancient furniture in the form of tables, chairs, cupboards and others are passed down from generation to age. *Kadipaten Mangkunegaran* (before Indonesian independence in 1945) was a center of government that had relations with other kingdoms in the world including those of Europe. The Netherlands kingdom had close relations with

Mangkunegaran (the Dutch was invaders at that time). Thus, the question to be answered is whether the forms of the ancient furniture was also influenced by the furniture from Netherlands or Europe.

The use of imported furniture trend from Europe began from the pre-VOC era in Java, including in the 1650s, when the "*Bakul*" chair was brought by Burgomaster, in the 1700s when "*Prancisan*" (French) style furniture, and in the Raffles government with the emergence of "*Rafflesan*" chairs [4]. The European style chairs were of course only owned by the indigenous people with high social strata, such as the aristocrate or *priyayi* (distinguished members of the society).

Related to the preservation guidelines in ancient times, when Indonesia, including *Kadipaten Mangkunegaran*, was still colonized by the Dutch, there was a regulation on preservation of ancient objects, which refers to the "Monumenten Ordantie Stbl.238 / 1931 (hereinafter called M.O.1931). In M.O.1931 article 1" which defines ancient objects as follows. a) Movable or immovable objects made by human hands, parts or groups of objects and also remains that are essentially 50 years old or have a lifetime that is at least 50 years old and considered to have important value for prehistory, history or art. b) Objects that are considered to have important values seen from the point of palaeoanthropology. Sites that have strong basic evidence that there are objects referred to in ad.a and ad. b [5].

The conservation targets based on M.O.1931 include written documents, paintings, sculptures, furniture, then increased to temple buildings, palaces, fortresses, caves [5]. The furniture in question includes tables, chairs, cupboards and so on.

In connection with this research, what needs to be preserved is 50 years old Mangkunegaran Palace Furniture, and has important values in the science of art and design. In Indonesia, especially Java, the number fifty becomes special because it is associated with conservation. The ancestors of the Javanese taught the wise in the form of the words "*Yen wis kliwat separo abad, jwa kongsi binabad*" which means that if an object has passed half a century or 50 years, is not to be destroyed [5]. For this reason, furniture in the 50-year-old Mangkunegaran Palace should not be destroyed or extinct.

2. METHOD

The research location is Mangkunegaran Palace in the city of Surakarta, Central Java Province, Indonesia. This type of qualitative research is capable of capturing various qualitative information with careful and nuanced descriptions, which are more valuable than mere statements of numbers or frequency in the form of numbers [6]. The method used was hermeneutic research method to examine, understand, and interpret things to explain certain reality [7]. The data were in the form of ancient furniture in the Mangkunegaran Palace which were analyzed and described regarding its type, function, material, technical, style, aesthetics, and preservation. Informants related to data collection consisted of interior designers, Mangkunegaran parties, observers of Javanese culture and others. The paradigm of interpretation analysis has a literal understanding, among others, of breaking things down into the order to comment or examine something as a whole [8]. The ancient furniture data of the Mangkunegaran palace were then studied in terms of aesthetics and style to be interpreted. This is in line with Spradley's argument, that interpretation often represents a kind of refreshment of thought. Ideas can come from past reading, certain theoretical perspectives, and some comments expressed by informants [9].

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Ancient Furniture with *Renaissance* Style in Mangkunegaran Palace

Some interesting findings regarding the ancient furniture in Mangkunegaran Palace are the existence of the Renaissance and Rococo styles which are developments in aesthetic styles in Europe. There is furniture in the form of a cupboard in the Renaissance style (1485-1643). What is meant by the Renaissance is the rebirth, a view of life that denied the Middle Ages in which religion (the Church) greatly dominated various sectors of life [1]. The Renaissance style of furniture in Mangkunegaran is characterized by a wide composition, solid shape, heavy carvings, and deep relief. The wide-proportion composition is a reaction from the Middle Ages, in which architecture and furniture were mostly in the form of soaring shapes pointed to the position of God which is considered to be above. This shows a very strong religious or church influence, and its aesthetics is guided by religion. However, in the Mangkunegaran Palace, the atmosphere that would be created had nothing to do with the concept of the Middle Ages above, but rather to collect or purchase items from Europe, including furniture from various ages that matched the atmosphere of the Mangkunegaran Palace and added the majesty of the Mangkunegaran Palace. This is not strange considering that the government of *Kadipaten Mangkunegaran* is quite long-lasting. Although it was still colonized at that time, the *Kadipaten Mangkunegaran* still had cooperation with the European kingdoms that made a collection of objects from various ages possible.

3.2 Ancient Furniture with Rococo Style in Mangkunegaran Palace

The next finding is the Rococo style chairs and tables. This style emerged in the Louis XV period in France and later spread to Europe including the Dutch who were also the invaders of Indonesia. Rococo style has a characteristic of applying many curved elements. The Rococo-style round table at the Mangkunegaran Palace serves as a cupboard side table to place two half-body sculptures. Above the two sculptures, on the wall, a mirror is on display.

The tables with round and Rococo-style do not have problems aesthetically. Considering that this design appeared in accordance with its time, its beauty was in accordance with the period in which this design was popular. This table with round shape will function appropriately if placed in the middle of the room with or without chairs surrounding it. But when these round tables are placed on the side of a wall, such placement makes its function less effective. It would be more appropriate if the table on display was in the form of a rectangle. Another finding is the Rococo style chair. Judging from the shape, the chair has a wider seat characteristic and use many curved lines or avoid straight lines. Related to this, Rococo style chair and table legs are curved and decorated with ornaments, also with curved shapes. The presence of Rococo-style furniture in the Mangkunegaran Palace adds to the beauty of its interior and supports the grand atmosphere in the Palace.

Rococo is a style that appears after the Baroque style which not only affects the style of furniture but also architectural styles. In the mid-18th century in Italy, the Baroque influence had begun to decline because it had reached a high level and could not be developed further. In building art, especially ornaments, baroque style creations are becoming too exaggerated. This was later called Rococo, a term for Baroque style decline. The term Rococo is taken from the word *Rocaille*, which is an ornamental shell art that was very popular at that time. But actually, Rococo is not considered as high-quality works of art, but as a common art. [1].

3.3 Preservation of Ancient Furniture in Mangkunegaran Palace in the Context of Javanese Culture

Preservation is the management of change, which is an effort to manage heritage through research, planning, protection, maintenance, utilization, supervision, and / or development activities to selectively maintain the continuity, harmony and carrying capacity in responding to the dynamics of certain era to build a better quality life of the nation [10]. The meaning of conservation can include all maintenance activities in accordance with local conditions. Conservation activities can also cover the scope of preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and revitalization [11]. In the Mangkunegaran Palace, ancient table and chair designs originated from Europe, but if seen by common people, they would appear to blend with the architecture and interior of the Mangkunegaran Palace. This is because the Mangkunegaran palace has many curved elements in its building ornaments. Moreover, the finishing that contain gold nuance matches the interior of the Mangkunegaran Palace which also has a gold color.

The task of economic history is to determine when and how modern capitalism started, where the foundations were formed, to what extent capitalism can be said to be the work of Western Europe, and how the existence of these periods is characterized by different social and economic structures [12]. The influence of economic development in Europe, which refers to the forms of modern capitalist development from the Western world, then penetrated into the development of Eastern world culture. One of the countries with Eastern culture is Indonesia, especially Java, which at that time had palaces as the parameter of its local culture. The development of Javanese architecture is basically determined by the authorities so that the application of its classification is very dependent on the building of the highest authority [13]. In the period before the entry of Japan to Indonesia, the relations and cultural influences of the Europeans with kings and high-ranking government officials in Java were very strong. This resulted in a culture that also affected the lifestyle of the Javanese royal family. In this context, one of the lifestyle implemented was in the form of furniture.

Hauser divided the classifications of art works in certain community into three hierarchies, namely high art, folk art, and popular art [14]. The furniture found in the context of palace environment are classified as high art, which is characterized by product quality, style, and aesthetics. This form of furniture classification as art in society refers to its use in the style of the upper class society (nobility) of Europeans. Most of the furnitures are made of wood, where a lot of wood is produced in the Indonesian archipelago. Furniture, in the context of artifacts, has properties that are not durable and short-lived, so that the noble works of these materials tend to become extinct [15]. To preserve this, conservation efforts both physically and scientifically that are derived from studies are needed.

Conservation related to the repertoire of Javanese culture does not have to take the style or origin of the chair or table designs in Mangkunegaran Palace as problem. The diverse styles and origins have become something common because the Javanese culture itself is influenced by outside cultures such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, China, and Colonial culture (Portuguese, English, Dutch, and Japanese). Preservation in the context of the Mangkunegaran Palace may have been considered complete, with the current status of Mangkunegaran Palace as a museum. However, preservation in the context of science can still be reviewed with the note that interesting new findings can be obtained. This research can be continued and will be more complete if it is continued with furniture studies in more detail, which will then be documented in the form of drawing works equipped with dimensions, notations and perspective drawings. The benefits of a more detailed research are to be used as guidelines for reproduction or redesign to develop ancient furniture.

If taken into consideration, Javanese culture is actually formed from a process of mixing with other cultures. Western culture that was brought by the Portuguese, British and Dutch in the form of objects found in Java as they are in Europe. However, the existence of imported furniture in the midst of Javanese culture has changed its meaning to be different from the meaning in its native country. For example, when the royal palace purchased horse-drawn carriages from the Netherlands, they were then honored with Javanese names and treated as if they belonged to the Javanese and parts of Javanese culture.

4. CONCLUSION

The types and functions of ancient furniture of over 50 years old at Mangkunegaran Palace are chairs, tables and cupboards. The material used to make the furniture is teak wood. The construction technique applied was using a peg and mortise joints fixed with a pin.

Renaissance style ancient furniture has the characteristic of a widening composition. Another style found is Rococo, which is the style of furniture that exploits curved elements such as curved lines ornaments applied to furniture with curved shape.

When viewed from the aesthetic terms, ancient furniture in the Renaissance and Rococo styles have the beauty that represents their era. In the era of their emergence, these styles were very popular to many people and were not only limited to the European community but were also able to penetrate other parts of the world including Indonesia, especially in Java. Renaissance and Rococo style furniture in Europe were widely used by kings and nobles so that it was suitable when such furniture were used by Javanese nobles. Even the common people thought that the furniture were Javanese cultural heritage.

In the context of preserving the repertoire of Javanese culture, it should be noted that the furniture material is from non-durable wood. Thus the form of preservation is reproduction using the same material, size and finishing, or replicating them. Of course, without intending to make an imitation, the original furniture should be stored in a museum while the replica can be used for everyday purposes in the Mangkunegaran Palace.

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