

Woven Bamboo Utensils in Tasikmalaya Everyday Life: Discovering the Root of Weaving Activities and Their Development Through the Perspective of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

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Woven Bamboo Utensils in Tasikmalaya Everyday Life: Discovering the Root of Weaving Activities and Their Development Through the Perspective of Cultural- Historical Activity Theory

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Abstract

Historically, the Tasikmalaya people have expanded their weaving activities. There was a significant change rooted in their habits during the 19th century. Using the cultural-historical activity theory, I intend to discover the roles of woven bamboo products and the Tasikmalaya development's historical roots, current activities, and contradictions in the transformation of their material life. Woven bamboo artefacts are considered a matter of object-centered practice in the activity system of Tasikmalaya inhabitants throughout time. The vision of the cultural-historical activity theory depicts the recent conditions of merging the use of new and traditional tools in everyday practices at the community and official levels. I argue that the principles of the cultural-historical activity theory are circumstantial because they adapt old and new practices consisting of activity systems oriented at objects. However, in the Indonesian context, adaptation and flexibility are identical to the characteristics of societies. As illustrated in the situations related to the Tasikmalaya daily tools and special occasions today, advanced technology and new material matter in the stabilization process of expansive learning prevent the use of traditional tools instead.

Keyword

woven bamboo products; Tasikmalaya; Indonesia; cultural-historical activity theory

インドネシア西ジャワ州タシクマラヤ地域における竹製日用品： 文化・歴史的活動理論を用いた編組品製作活動の起源と発展の検討

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要旨

インドネシア西ジャワ州タシクマラヤ地域の人びとは歴史的に編組品を製作してきたが、19世紀における生活環境の変化は製作活動にも大きな変容をもたらした。本稿では、文化・歴史的活動理論を用いて、タシクマラヤにおける地域発展の歴史的変遷および日常における物質文化の変容に伴う諸課題を考察し、今日における竹製品の役割を検討する。竹製工芸品の製作は、変容期におけるタシクマラヤ住民の活動システムにおいて、ものを中心とした重要な実践行為としてみ

なされており、ここでは特に文化・歴史的活動理論を用いて、地域社会の日常的な実践行為における近代的製品と伝統的製品の併用についての現状を示す。また本稿では、文化・歴史的活動理論を用いて、ものを中心とした活動システムからなる新旧の実践行為およびその融合について考察する。インドネシアの社会的文脈においては、適応力や柔軟性は社会的特徴である。タシクマラヤにおける日常的な道具や非日常における実践の状況を描くことで、拡張的学習における安定化のプロセスにおいて、先進的技術と新しい素材の利用が必ずしも伝統的道具の利用を妨げているわけではないことを示す。

キーワード

竹製編組品, タシクマラヤ, インドネシア, 文化・歴史的活動理論

1 Introduction

Since people settled and farmed in 19th-century West Java, locals in Tasikmalaya have been producing and using woven bamboo products as daily utensils such as for cooking and farming. Following the socioeconomic changes, the expanded from the making of everyday objects into the commodification of daily utensils. Current existing woven bamboo products have the same shape as tools from the time they were invented and developed. The way that people in Tasikmalaya have kept using bamboo utensils in their daily lives provides insight into their present life.

In this paper, I focus on the woven bamboo used in everyday utensils in Tasikmalaya, West Java, particularly in Tasikmalaya City and show that these cultural objects are taking part in the development process of Tasikmalaya society. The most common image of Tasikmalaya for Indonesians is that of their skillful craftspeople and their multifaceted use of bamboo. Thus, I am asking why Tasikmalaya locals take a continuing pride in their bamboo utensils and how this reflects their cultural identity. Responding to the habits of using woven bamboo in their everyday life, Tasikmalaya's regional government has been trying to support

the makers of the crafts and promote their areas as the city for craft producers since 1855. The continuing process of using woven bamboo products as utensils in Tasikmalaya emphasizes the era when people used and bartered the excess number of woven bamboo products they produced before the *Cultuur Stelsel*¹ on Java Island. The cultivation system then interfered weaving in Tasikmalaya as their main activity. The essential distinctiveness from the historical point of Tasikmalaya is the shifting period from the era of the cultivation system by the Dutch government in the past to the succeeding situation of woven bamboo products, which started to have an economic value as craft products. That selling then represented the peak of the woven bamboo business from 1921–1927 (Sakri 2009, 141). (Figure 1)

Corresponding to the availability of natural resources, people near Tasikmalaya have a greater chance at a lower price to get bamboo than do people in other cities in West Java. Compared to those in cities in West Java, which are far from the resources area, people in the capital city of West Java, Bandung, have a greater tendency to use natural materials in their routines. The present situation is that in individual, community, and government spheres, people prefer to involve woven bamboo



Figure 1: Map of Indonesia, Western Java, and Tasikmalaya City

Source: Amira Rahardiani

products to help their activities and represent their pride in having bamboo products in their lives by holding cultural and crafts events. Regarding the recent condition of the habits of using traditional products, I take the perspective of the activity system by Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, in his book *Mind in Society* (1896–1934) in this paper. The study was later modified by scholars such as Leont'ev (1978), Davydov (1982), and Engeström (1987). The intent of using the ideas rooted in the activity system for this paper is delineate and represent the complexity of the whole society. That should be analyzable within multiple spheres (e.g., social, cultural, economic dimensions of Tasikmalaya society). To be more specific, human beings are being culturally mediated, and it is dynamic rather than static (Engeström 1987; Vygotsky 1978, as cited in Foot 2014). Moreover, I use the viewpoint of the cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström 1987) as a main framework to correspond to the historical

roots of the weaving activities in Tasikmalaya as the important factor of today's habits through the process of learning. Everyday activities can be indicated as automatic operations through the repeated practices (Engeström 1990, 173) and every action in everyday life can determine the relation between subjects and artefacts in one sphere.

In this paper, in short, I address the developmental process of society in conjunction with the contradictions of existing habits of using traditional utensils. With the perspective of cultural-historical activity theory, I discuss the significance and preference to use natural materials in different spheres of society instead of getting rid of them for industrialized materials. Existing studies of woven bamboo in West Java have mostly talked about the subject from an approach of history, economics, and design. Existing research in the design field—such as the work by Larasati et al. 2013 titled “How Far Can You Go With

Bamboo? Compromising Traditional and Contemporary Methods in Bamboo Product Design and Production in Tasikmalaya, West Java” –elaborates the traditional and manual techniques of making daily utensils from bamboo in Tasikmalaya, techniques which could be developed into contemporary methods of fashioning new bamboo designs. The perspective of expansive learning (Engeström 1999; 2015; 2016) is expected to be a new approach in interpreting the significance of woven bamboo products in everyday activities from the history of their use to the current development process in the area. Today in Tasikmalaya, all of these factors should be taken from the viewpoint of development studies along with the invention of technology and variegated of culture globally.

Slightly, in the Indonesian case where the characteristics of people mainly tend to be ‘open’ to changes, the innovation of new objects engages the society shifted into a new practice without negotiating with the old practice. The cultural-historical activity theory conception as the main theoretical framework of this paper, are interwoven into the ethnography observation from July-September 2018 in Tasikmalaya, West Java. This area is well known to the inhabitants with their ‘inseparable habits’ alongside bamboo material since ancient times. The image has been ground into the culture’s historical background and stories to present times as their ideas regarding using bamboo material for their everyday activities and festivals have preserved their culture with bamboo.

2 Research Methods

The qualitative approach and ethnographic study method are used in this study following

the notions of understanding ‘the field’ to be a part of the professional practice of anthropology. The approaches, in this sense, are intended to understand people’s behavior in the present situation of one area to represent the changes of their ideas in the development process. The research was conducted in the Tasikmalaya City, West Java Province, Indonesia in 2018. To avoid bias and subjectivity in this study, data validity was recorded through note-taking from interviews, picture-taking, audio recording, and video recording, which was allowed by the research subjects. A literature analysis and the ethnography study were done. The perspective of livelihood in West Java villages is necessary to understand the changes of this particular land historically, while I was making a move to observe the characteristics and habits in Tasikmalaya society. Understanding from the field and the view from the literature were intended to comprehend the knowledge of how West Java people make relationships and the natural resources available to them to bring them into the continuing cultural activities. The clarification of what happening in the field and the existing literatures about Tasikmalaya is also needed in the sense that this paper stresses ‘history’ as the main idea to implement the theoretical framework in the ‘cultural-historical activity theory’.

To understand how bamboo products as cultural objects in Tasikmalaya are involved in the family and community spheres, the individual approach to one subject research is needed. To begin the study, observation and interviews were conducted starting from the biggest market in Tasikmalaya, the Cikurubuk Market. The main interview in the market with Mrs. Sari² (a woven bamboo products merchant at Cikurubuk Market) started my

ethnographical research of everyday life in July 2018. She introduced me to all of her families who lived in Muncang. I participated as an observer, involved in their daily life, and followed each activity by members of their big families. From following their daily activities, I was then introduced to all networks, which I describe in the findings section, where I could describe their family and community habits and ideas resulting from the in-depth interview process.

To take the perspective from the official level, the data collections through interviews in the Department of Industry and Commerce of Tasikmalaya City and in the headquarter of the Urang Tasik local community in Leuwihieum were conducted both in 2018 and 2019. Understanding the continuing interview processes in this research is needed following the common manner in Indonesia to sustain connections not limited to a research purpose. Further, I did data checking and a literature review to understanding the present situations and changes. The peer cross-examining of data was also conducted with the Urang Tasik community who archive Tasikmalaya history through old newspapers and books to reinforce the findings in the field. I further analyzed the findings of the present cultural practice and its history using the main theoretical framework in the discussion section with 'cultural-historical activity theory' principles.

3 Findings

3-1 First, Weaving Skills in Tasikmalaya, From Everyday Needs to Craft Industries

The Tasikmalaya area is surrounded by the mountains of Sadakeling, Cakrabuana, and Galunggung. There, the soil can sustain plant

growth. Its fertility is from the volcano eruption of Galunggung mountain, most recently in 1982 (Sakri 2009, 132). Thanks to it, Tasikmalaya has plenty of natural resources, such as bamboo trees, pandan and mendong leaves, rattan, and kiray trees. Among all the natural resources, bamboo has become famous (Larasati et al. 2013) for the Tasikmalaya people starting from 1901, when one person named Mr. Martadinata (often called Haji Soheh) started to spread the knowledge of the weaving technique in Tasikmalaya. The skill for making crafts kept spreading, though not only with bamboo. The people at that time tried to imitate the skill of weaving bamboo with other natural materials that mostly had been growing in the northern and eastern parts of Tasikmalaya.³

Having 2,996 small industries with 30,501 people involved, Tasikmalaya has been famous for its handicrafts⁴ in Indonesia. One of the most popular among their eight small and medium enterprise commodities⁵ is the bamboo craft. At first, the innovation of making the local product was related to the activities that people had. Local people tried to adjust their needs by making daily utensils with the existing raw materials around them (i.e., bamboo). This was specifically to meet the need for utensils in the kitchen and for farming activities.

During the Dutch colonialization in Indonesia, the colonial government at first did not pay much attention to the woven-product sectors that the people had until 1900. The craft sector was also considered not to offer much profit for the Dutch at the time. The Dutch felt they were disadvantaged by the existence of such small industries that rivalled the import products that were cheaper and of better quality (Sakri 2009, 137). The Dutch were more concerned with the sector of agriculture to be exported, not the

local craft itself. Once the system of *Cultuur Stelsel* (the cultivation system by the Dutch Government) was stopped, the wage labors for agriculture returned to making woven handicrafts as their main activities.

An interview in 1972 of a villager in Parakanhonje by Sakri at the northwestern part of Tasikmalaya described how the leader of making fine woven bamboo products was Mr. Martadinata. The area is also known as where fine woven bamboo products were first invented. The results of the interview agreed with other sources that Mr. Martadinata was the influential person for the works of fine woven products with all the background stories behind them. After the era of *Ethische Politiek*⁶ was announced, the Dutch noticed that they could use the skill of the people in Parakanhonje in making woven products for colonialization advantages and not only for the common needs of the people. Mr. Martadinata then travelled all over Java to share the knowledge and skills of weaving until 1907. In the era of the cultivation system, the Tasikmalaya people kept making woven bamboo utensils to support their plantation activities. The weaving activities had not entirely stopped but were no longer the main activity for the locals at the time, yet these shifted again to their primary activities when the Dutch cultivation system entirely stopped.

Tasikmalaya Governor R.A.A. Wiratuningrat (1908-1937) supported the handcrafting in Tasikmalaya and entrenched the local cooperation called *Pakumpulan Duit Hadiah* (Sastranegara 1933). Formerly, it was the peak of success for *topi rangkay* (a woven bamboo hat) business from 1921-1927. It was initiated by Haji Mansur in collaboration with Mr. Olivier (a Dutch entrepreneur). They introduced and exported the products they made to

Europe. Meanwhile, the Dutch intervened in the Tasikmalaya craft sector. The Dutch colonialization government also tried to develop the handicraft skills in formal education, starting at the primary school of the local people in Tasikmalaya (Sakri 1969).

In the *Report of Tasikmalaya Handicrafts in 1929-1930*, by Nijverheids-Commissie van het Java Instituut, the Dutch then established the school of handcrafting skill (*Ambachtschool*). The activity of weaving was developed by craftspeople in Tasikmalaya and used by the inhabitants themselves. The variation in patterns of woven bamboo products in Tasikmalaya has been developed and advanced, but the forms of everyday tools have not been changed since they were invented.

The period of the emergence of economic value in woven bamboo production from the influence of Mr. Martadinata (1901-1904), with later support from the Tasikmalaya government (1908-1937), was grounded in the era of producing woven bamboo products by locals. Products were based on narrow everyday needs or those (Sakri 2009) termed 'instinct' before 1900. People were gradually separated into groups of craftspeople and ordinary residents who lived in Tasikmalaya. Craftspeople lived commonly in one area and specialized in one skill in weaving techniques related to the spread of the skills, as mentioned regarding Parakanhonje (the northwestern part of Tasikmalaya City). However, ordinary residents commonly used bamboo products only for daily needs. Some craftspeople in the city currently live in the middle of ordinary residents, but in rural areas, they usually live in groups of similar crafters, such as in Cikadu Paniis Village.

Furthermore, to identify the change in the development process, I identify new tools and

technology with the term ‘contradiction’ and ‘woven bamboo products’ as ‘objects’ to analyze the changes in society and how the changes interrelate to their idea of ‘historicity.’

3-2 Second, Bamboo Involved in Local Life Today

3-2 A. Bamboo in family-level Tasikmalaya.

It is common for the people to share their utensils in rural Tasikmalaya – not only the woven bamboo but also all the kitchen and farming tools – for activities in their houses. “Da disini mah neng, satu barang teh ku saha weh dipakena, gimana butuhnya aja. [In here, one utensil can be used by anyone who needs it]”, said Mrs. Mima and Mrs. Tika, Mrs. Sari’s sisters.⁷ The products are used for mutual advantage and as shared utensils in one homeland. In the day-to-day activities, for instance, the *boboko* (rice container) can be moved from one house to another. (Figure 2)

In terms of sharing products, frequently someone comes to one house or another to pick up some utensils when they need them to help with their activities. Specifically, in the



Figure 2: A *boboko* (rice container) as shared utensils, Mrs. Mima taking it from parents’ house
Source: Amira Rahardiani, August 2018

cooking process, they prefer to lend to other family members rather than owning the utensils themselves in each house. Even though it is easy to get some from the market, Mrs. Mima said, “Ngapain beli sadua-dua neng, da di abah ema ge aya [We don’t feel that we need to buy it because our parents own it].”⁸

Other than *boboko* (rice container), the husks of raw rice are separated by using a *nyiru* (flat tray) in the rice-cooking processes. They usually do this activity in front of their houses. The dropped rice parts with rice husk, will be eaten by their roosters. In the next process of cooking, they prepare *aseupan* (cone-shaped woven bamboo) to put the rice inside and place it on the *langseng* (brass container to steam rice in). After the rice is cooked, the next step is *ngakeul* (the process of cooling down the cooked rice) using a *hihid* (fan) to give the rice a softer texture, and they serve it with another *boboko* (rice container). By continuing to use woven bamboo products in daily life, they preserve local bamboo for its original purposes for the needs of everyday activities. Here, I analyzed the woven bamboo products by their significant roles along with all kitchen tools. Cooking habits are thus constructed by using particular utensils and following local traditions. (Figure 3)

One of my findings is that the research subjects prefer to use woven bamboo utensils



Figure 3: Left to right: *Boboko* (rice container), *Hihid* (fan), and *Carangka Sampah* (woven bamboo basket)
Source: Amira Rahardiani, August 2018

because of health issues instead of using utensils made of plastics. They said they worried that the direct contact of cooked foods and the tools that contain colors would affect the quality of the food consumed by their family members. Especially for cooking, taste is the most important aspect of bamboo, other than the durability of the material. The people continue to use bamboo utensils in their cooking processes because they are afraid that the taste of food will change from the tastes with which they are familiar. However, the common practice of using bamboo utensils for their special smell and taste will not be replaced by the use of modernized tools. Even though they gradually changed the traditional way to a modern rice cooker, they never skipped the step of stirring the cooked rice with fanning it with a *hihid* (fan) and serving it with a *boboko* (rice container). They assume that by putting the cooked rice in *boboko* (rice container) makes the rice last longer. The gaps in the bamboo stripes pattern of *boboko* (rice container) absorbs water and makes it balance with the air inside and outside the container. So, the material culture that has existed in Tasikmalaya has been affected by social development, causing the Tasikmalaya people to combine the use of materials with their preferences, ideas, and beliefs regarding their use of utensils in daily activities.

3-2 B. Bamboo in Community-Level Tasikmalaya

Preferring bamboo tools in the urban areas is significant to their community life, especially on the Islamic sacrifice day, Eid Al-Adha. Tasikmalaya has 600,000 people in the city and the regency, mostly Muslim inhabitants. Eid Al-Adha is one of Islam's important annual festive days in Indonesia. The occasion is usually organized by one neighborhood association, so

people commonly share their ideas at both the family and community levels. The collective actions on the yearly events are related to the use of the same utensils, which helps them to conduct meaningful rituals for Muslims in Tasikmalaya and generally in Indonesia. Therefore, constructed by their annual rituals, the substitution or absence of certain tools as their habits might be termed as a 'misfit' (Kuutti 1996, as cited in Foot 2014, 337) in particular ritual processes. The repeated ritual activities give the use of woven bamboo products essential roles at the community level of Tasikmalaya society.

In Eid Al-Adha, the sacrifice festival, people tend to use the woven bamboo utensils to support their rituals with the handling of meat. They also consider the technical issues (their functionality and durability) of the materials that they use, especially for the tools related to foods. Their belief has been built upon the technical issues. The head man of the citizens association said, "Using the woven bamboo mat is a must for us. It has always been used on the day of Eid Al-Adha. Believe it or not, there will be some bad smells if we substitute the mat with the one made of canvas, so we prefer to use this bamboo mat and never change it."⁹

Nevertheless, the sacrifice festival is held all around the world; it would not be over-generalized to say that bamboo is the best material to handle the raw meat. People on each side of the country have their way to treat meat on Eid Al-Adha. The Tasikmalaya people have tried to use the natural material that existed around them, and they found their cultural habit of using the woven bamboo mat is best for handling the meat. The change of woven bamboo products to have the exchange value of commodities in Tasikmalaya involved in the



Figure 4: A *giribig* (woven bamboo mat) on Eid Al-Adha
Source: Amira Rahardiani, August 2018

capitalist activities in the market is indicated as the ‘primary contradiction.’ (Figure 4)

On the preparation day of Eid Al-Adha, people usually do collective cooking of the Eid dishes in large amounts. People share their general beliefs and thoughts when preparing for special occasions, following the existing behaviour in their society. Some bamboo utensils are used by all for special occasions and counted as necessary.¹⁰

After the Eid praying in the morning, people gather a sacrifice ritual. In the sacrificial processes, such as skinning and cutting the meat into smaller pieces, the woven bamboo basket named *carangka sampah* (basket) and *giribig* (mat) are vital in the processes. They clean the innards of goats and cows by using the stream at their residences. The meat is directly delivered to the cutting station at a house of the head man of the citizens association before it is distributed to all of the residents and to the poor nearby. (Figure 5)

To deliver the cut meat to all the houses in Sukarasa, the committee, consisting of adult men, chooses a bamboo stick and the basket *carangka sampah* (basket) as their preference (see Figure 5). Two men go back and forth from

the cutting station to the home residents. They carry bags of the cut meat on their shoulders and walk around their residential area.

The sacrifice festival of Eid Al-Adha is usually prepared by the committee of one citizen association. Their preference for using woven bamboo tools is because of their constructed habit and ideas on technical issues for how to treat the raw meat from year to year. By viewing the case in light of activity theory, along with Lektorsky, Engeström stated that it is important to discuss the internalization of collective activity to reveal the essential features of a group whose members carry out the joint activity and have the same characteristics and ideas (Lektorsky 1984, as cited in Engeström 1999, 44). The committee in Sukarasa, termed as a “collective subject,” carried out the collective activity of treating the woven bamboo, as this type of basket was always used for distributing the meat at the festival. The “collective subject” then later can be observed in light of its role in the collective activities required in fashioning woven bamboo baskets at the community level in Tasikmalaya. The committee members are usually ordinary inhabitants, not professionals, generally handling meat such as sellers in



Figure 5: A *carangka sampah* (woven bamboo basket) on Eid Al-Adha

Source: Amira Rahardiani, August 2018

the market, and they treat the meat as their experiences have shown them and follow the other members as their teachers. The use of woven bamboo tools has passed from generation to generation among the Tasikmalaya people.

Also, the neighborhood association committees in Tasikmalaya decorate the entrance gates of their settlements by using bamboo sticks and a *cecempeh* (bamboo flat tray) on the Independence Day of Indonesia. This tradition sparks a competitive excitement between neighborhood associations. Bamboo, based on the Indonesian's ideas about colonialism, represents the spirit of winning the struggles. While the colonialists had advanced guns, Indonesian fighters depended on sharpened bamboo¹¹. In a broader comparison to other areas in West Java, people have been changing the *cecempeh*-gate to other materials such as aluminum.

In rural Tasikmalaya, most of the *rukun tetangga* (neighbourhood associations) lead their inhabitants to build the gate in front of their residential areas. The bamboo gate is formed with bamboo sticks both on the right and left sides. For the people in Tasikmalaya it has become an irreplaceable tradition to use the *cecempeh* (bamboo flat tray) for making the gate. Mrs. Sari said, "We usually run out of stock for *cecempeh* (bamboo flat tray) from a week before the day of Indonesian Independence Day. Various groups of people come to buy with a bunch number at once."¹² In the case of the bamboo gate, it makes sense that the 'historical' ideas for using bamboo in the colonial period urged people to have it on the Independence Day festivals as the reminder of struggles in the past.

In other districts, some *rukun tetanggas* (neighbourhood associations) organized a lottery to get some goods for daily utensils, and most of the products are kitchen utensils made

of woven bamboo. Another way to celebrate Independence Day, participating in *panjat pinang* (a greasy pole) has been popular in Indonesia since the old time. Historically, it was made by the Dutch colonial government to make such entertaining attractions. There are other ways of celebrating Independence Day, but in Tasikmalaya, people include the woven bamboo products as the main objects as decorations and prizes in competitions.

3.2 C. Bamboo in Official-Level Tasikmalaya

As utensils, bamboo has been used in activities in Tasikmalaya as part of the old habits they had been practicing and adapting in their lives. The importance of the activity system (Davydov in Engeström 1999, 39–52) in one society tends to make rational sense of that situation. Hence, everyday life in one activity system is taking woven bamboo products as collective objects interrelated to the people who use them.

For such an intention to create excitement for making crafts, local communities and the government work together for a crafts and culture festival named Motekart. It is held in front of *Gedong Bupati* (the regent's residence) in Tasikmalaya on the day of the Tasikmalaya anniversary in 2015. The committee of the festival collaborates with the local community *Urang Tasik*¹³, which specializes in making art installations made of bamboo, to make an Eiffel Tower replica. In 1898, a replica of the Eiffel Tower was built in Tasikmalaya, as proposed by the Dutch colonial government. In 1898, the Dutch who lived in Indonesia wanted to show their appreciation to Queen Wilhelmina, who had just been crowned as the Queen of the Netherlands. The first bamboo tower replica in Tasikmalaya was about 40 meters high. The present Tasikmalaya government also aims for

the event to commemorate the 1898 memory to show how Tasikmalaya uses bamboo the same way as was done in old times. People in Tasikmalaya have the satisfaction of expressing their pride and feel the Eiffel Tower replica made of bamboo is unique.

Local government first organized the Tasik Creative and Craft Festival (TCCF) in 2010, and the Bank of Indonesia (the central bank of the Republic Indonesia) sponsored the event in 2014. Starting from the 2017 event, the Tasikmalaya government proposed a bigger craft and creative festival and changed the name to the Tasikmalaya *Oktober* Festival (TOF).¹⁴ Bamboo essentially dominated the decorations of the event such as in the built-up hallways, gates, and sign towers. Since the first event, *Urang Tasik*, the local community has been counted on to take part in the event to adorn the TOF through making art installations made of bamboo. The installations are the main attraction for the visitors such as the *Lorong Cika-Cika* (hallway) and *Go Roll Long* (three-meters-in-diameter rolling woven bamboo ball) in the 2018 festival.

The installations in the event held by the official-level Tasikmalaya are intended to provide the idea of making crafts in Tasikmalaya, based on the people's local resources and handmade skills. The yearly craft events convey a lot of clout and many ideas to both the visitors and the local inhabitants in the Tasikmalaya society as a whole.

Modern craft industries have been getting popular in Indonesia; the use of natural materials as the primary component for producing some craft products also has become a trend. In Tasikmalaya, besides holding an annual craft event, a phenomenon of many craft makers from big cities outside the area come

to collaborate their projects with some touch of the hand-skill that craftspeople in Tasikmalaya have. Other than crafts, people who conduct some construction works or have a demand for the raw materials usually import the materials from Tasikmalaya.

3-3. Bamboo in Tasikmalaya: Historical Context, Present-Day Culture, and the Activity Principles

The previous discussion on bamboo's historical and present-day significance (at the individual, family, and community levels) in Tasikmalaya sheds light on the role of the bamboo product as an object from earlier times until the present day. To clarify, participants in the activities engage with and act upon an object in various ways, and we see the phenomenon of the same activity system appearing in every social sphere. Therefore, the recognition of objects-subjects' activities requires detailed investigation from multiple viewpoints within the activity system. Before entering the discussion on activity theory, it is crucial to understand the five principles of the third generation of activity theory as the foundation of the ideas (Engeström 2001, 136–137). Instead of describing all of the principles, this paper starts from the third principle, and moves through the fourth and fifth principles, which is adequate for an analysis of activity systems in one society as a whole.

Activity systems are shaped over a period of time, thus, in this sense, we grab the "third principle" of activity theory and use it to focus on Tasikmalaya historicity. The shifting of ecological conditions and the widespread sharing of skills in making crafts from natural materials drive the expansion of bamboo products of various types in present-day Tasikmalaya. The intervention of Dutch colonialization transitioned people from

producing woven products to working in agricultural lands but did not eliminate the skills necessary for making bamboo products. The aforementioned changes in Tasikmalaya culture signify “contradictions.” In activity theory, the central role of “contradictions” is seen as the “fourth principle.” Contradictions are not the same as problems or conflicts (Engeström 2001, 137). The unavoidable industrialization in a particular area, along with the resulting changes in material life, in this sense can be seen as the “primary contradiction.” The shifting values of commodities and the emergence of local markets in place of bartering change the division of labor and composition of occupations in Tasikmalaya.

Lastly, the “fifth principle” of activity theory demonstrates the idea of *the possibility of expansive transformations* in activity systems. Instead of seeing changes in society whereby object-subject relations exist as only disturbance and conflict within their culture, the activity theory principles claim that such changes in activity are also sources of innovation. To view the results of the aforementioned findings from the perspective of the social sphere in Tasikmalaya, in the next section we will discuss results of the principles of activity theory in the Tasikmalaya case and explore further possible discourse.

4 Results and Discussion

4-1 *The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Activity Principles of Bamboo Culture in Tasikmalaya.*

Historical background and existing habits are important aspects for those constructing the ideas today in Tasikmalaya. In this study, the term ‘historical’ is used in conjunction with the term ‘cultural’ to specify current daily activities in Tasikmalaya. Object-related culture

is fundamentally connected to the existing habits people have kept from the olden times. Consequently, through looking at their everyday activities and their festivals, the elucidation of what causes the Tasikmalaya people to prefer to use bamboo materials consistently must be highlighted from the path of history, which reveals their actions. In the development process, the term ‘activity’ in this study refers to what people do in each sphere (family, community, and official levels) of their society, which is altered by the ‘historical’ and the ‘cultural’ terms to present their condition.

First, by following the vision of the ‘third principle’ in activity theory, which focuses on the term ‘historicity,’ crafts made of bamboo were naturally invented by the Tasikmalaya people as related to their daily activities, and it has developed into the activity of selling and making bamboo products as crafts.

Second, in the development of Tasikmalaya society, it is inevitable that the use of new materials instead of only bamboo illustrates the concept of the ‘fourth principle’ in activity theory. As an example, in the sacrifice festival (Eid Al-Adha), the first ‘contradiction’ in activity theory principles is depicted by the use of a mat made of plastic or canvas with economic reasons instead of using the bamboo mat that follows the common ideas in the cutting meat process.

The ‘fifth principle’ in the activity system of the Tasikmalaya society on a broader scale is illustrated by the use of woven bamboo in festivals, which goes beyond the form of everyday utensils in Tasikmalaya. The possibility of expansive transformation forms of everyday utensils to other designs such as huge installations and parade costumes indicates the transformations from the common usage

of woven bamboo patterns. The contradictions of new materials in the activity system have triggered people into new ideas and neglected bamboo as their identic material life. The awareness of bamboo as a huge potential by the local community and the government of Tasikmalaya then counts as an effort to escalate the collaborative envisioning of a bamboo culture in the future. Everyday utensils made of bamboo, placed only in the kitchen or as market products, are 'reconceptualized' and raised into the decorative in the Tasikmalaya *Oktober* Festivals year to year.

After presenting the vision of 'third, fourth, and fifth principles' of activity theory in this study, in the next section, I will discuss each standpoint that causes a continuing bamboo life for the Tasikmalaya people through activity theory principles with its contradictions.

4-2 Activity Theory Principles and Contradictions

In this section, the overview of the notion of activity theory leads to the idea of taking a perspective of cultural-historical activity theory. The theoretical framework of the activity theory described in Engeström (1999) stated: First, activity theory is deeply contextual and oriented at understanding historically specific local practices, their objects, mediating artefacts, and social organization (Cole and Engeström 1993). Second, activity theory is based on a dialectical theory of knowledge and thinking, focused on the creative potential in human cognition (Il'enkov 1977; Davydov 1990). Third, activity theory is a developmental theory that seeks to explain and influence qualitative changes in human practices over time. (Engeström 1999, 378).¹⁵

From the third principle of the activity theory, which tends to its 'historicity', I

make a motion for the vision of this research to the fourth principle, which stresses the role of contradictions as a source of change and development. Contradictions in cultural-historical activity theory are not described as conflicts but are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between 'activity systems' (Engeström 1990, 137). In the sense of objects, woven bamboo utensils can be seen as artefacts and the factors of 'objects-orientedness' (Engeström 2001,134), which became the key to understanding cultural entities. The development process will always be changing the social conditions in people's routines. Cultural-historical activity theory basically takes the perspective of cultural and historical background as underlying causes of conformity between the present object and its history.

At first, by studying the vision of the triad diagram of contradictions in *Children's Health Care in the Helsinki Area* (Engeström 2001, 145), I was captivated by how the objects became cultural entities and the object of action became a key to understanding human psyche, which is grounded in a historical situation. Rooted on the idea of Vygotsky (1978, 40), the activity systems have been developed into multi-emphasis, such as multiple points of view, spotlighting the historicity, and making the contradictions the central role of activity systems, which Engeström (2001) described as the evolution and five central ideas of activity theory. The term 'contradictions' can be analyzed as the primary and secondary contradictions, which will presuppose the new practice as the result offered through the new practices in an on-going developmental situation. The change from inner factors such as the shifting process in using utensils in everyday

practices. In this paper, we will view them as the first contradiction. When the activity system adopts a new element from the outside, it often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction, where some old element (Engeström 2001, 137) shatters with the absorption of the new technology. Many tools made of industrialized and artificial materials have affected the activity system of everyday lives globally since the industrial revolution. People have been flowing and adjusting their activities with the new tools, which in cultural-historical activity theory is the so-called 'open system.' The dualism of using woven bamboo products and the industrialized materials in the case study of this paper illustrates the contradictions that provoke the conflict with everyday activities. However, new materials can be seen as innovations for one society. Following the vision from the activity theory principles, the contradictions and development factors are recognized as the sources of development and richness, not a weakness in one activity system. From this point, we can explore how the significant object-centered activity systems change in society as a case study.

Formerly, based on the fifth principle of the activity system, the prospect of the wide-ranging actions and transformations of using utensils at the individual and community level leads to the equalization of ideas between inhabitants who will rise into a bigger sphere (to the official level). To intensify the idea of the 'zone of proximal development' in this study, I turned to Engeström, who analyzed the development in the following: It is the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the social activity that can collectively be generated as a solution to the double bind potentially

embedded in the everyday actions (Engeström 1987, 174 in Engeström 2001, 137).

Activity is not a reaction or a totality of reactions but rather a system that has its structure, internal transitions and transformations, and development (Leont'ev 1978, 84). The constructed behavior of using woven bamboo utensils is transferred from humans' minds throughout their activities in society. Regarding utensils in family and community levels, I take a view of woven bamboo products as being 'social objects,' as Verenikina (2010) described the objects with certain modes of operation developed socially in the course of labor and that are only possible because they correspond to the objectives of a practical action. By making festivals that mainly decorate with bamboo, the initiators of the events tend to build up the gigantic installation to show their feeling of pride for having bamboo around them. This is clear in the changing situations since people settled in Tasikmalaya invented the weaving activities, the interruption by the *Cultuur Stelsel*, and the influence of Western economies as contradictions in West Java, which have not stopped the practices of weaving in Tasikmalaya.

Rooted to the literature reviews of the pasts and the participatory observation experience in today's Tasikmalaya, the implications of the development and contradictions are offered from the point of view of the cultural-historical activity theory and moreover, expansive learning is viewed as the suggestion for further studies of this paper.

5 Further Discussion: Expansive Learning Principles in Tasikmalaya Crafts-Development

In the previous section about the history

of bamboo culture in Tasikmalaya and how it affects people's minds in present days, brings the original idea of Vygotsky in his 'psychological tools' that human external activity is aimed at mastering and triumphing over nature (Vygotsky 1978, 55 in Engeström 2015, 48.) The new mediating artifacts such as machines in crafts production and advanced kitchen tools in everyday life Tasikmalaya, engaged people to adjust their activities which I see as 'expansive transformations.' In this sense, this paper suggests that further discussion is needed to analyze the use of an expansive learning cycle then presents as a new practice in each action and generates the new model of activity in Tasikmalaya.

To recall the discussion about contradictions in preceding sections, we have discussed 'primary contradictions' or inner conflict; 'secondary contradictions,' to indicate influence from outside; and 'tertiary contradictions' when they try to represent their culture through organizing crafts festivals, and there might be another phase of more complex contradictory situations such as 'quaternary contradictions' in the 'expansive learning principles.' Starting from the settled people in Tasikmalaya doing weaving activities, the socio-economic situations gradually changed which was made bamboo making activities a profession. Producing bamboo crafts now related to the chains of capitalist and having aesthetics meaning, not only the needs of daily activities such as making food and farming. It is followed by an expansive transition from the traditional way to the advanced technology in using everyday utensils at the individual level. Reflected in their historical origins and succession of making bamboo products, causing the society to involve bamboo in their everyday lives and festivals in

the process of learning among people around them through practices.

The stabilization phase between the existing traditional tools in daily life and the new (such as tools with machines), eventually a big alteration in all levels of society headed to the same action point to bring up the crafts and daily bamboo product industries as their pride of material culture from Tasikmalaya. Finally, this study could bring the idea of cultural-historical activity theory to the advance phase for the study of crafts and its development. The innovation to present their ideas of the skilful craftspeople and natural material in abundance can be realized in using woven bamboo products on their special occasions and yearly crafts festivals. Those are the factors of object-historical, theory-historical, and actual-empirical analysis that constructed the idea of using woven bamboo in Tasikmalaya today. Beyond learning within science and art, 'expansive learning principles' are also contextual in the development of craft activities in Tasikmalaya.

6 Conclusion

Through tracing from the historical background, looking at the everyday activities and rituals, and glancing at the new ideas on using woven bamboo products, present practices in Tasikmalaya are grounded in the historical background on weaving activities in the olden times. As a practical theory, cultural-historical activity theory capacitates rich analysis of the complicated activity systems rooted in the history and the changing forms of collaborative human activities.

In this paper, I present the development of the well-known area for woven bamboo products, Tasikmalaya, with their historical

background of weaving in the 19th century and the contradictions on using utensils for their activities and rituals. A crucial point in the colonialization era shifted the woven bamboo products to having two meanings for local people first, as utensils to help their everyday activities and their rituals, and second, to represent their culture through bamboo material during their festivals.

Considering the cultural-historical activity theory of Engeström (1987), I analyzed the current Tasikmalaya with 'primary contradiction' from the inner conflict and 'secondary contradiction' in the insertion of the Western economic system on producing woven bamboo products instead of only for everyday utensils. The 'third contradiction' then influenced Tasikmalaya in the innovation alternative ways of their practices and affecting their habits while presenting new challenges of preserving weaving activities in the expansive learning of the society. The past can be seen as the fundamental cause and should be involved in the activity systems. This is essential to identify the phenomena and to make rational sense of the situation.

The contradictions in the cycle of learning actions are essential in a society's development process. There is also a possibility to view the research of object-related activities from the view of expansive learning in the future. The ideas among people are interwoven into the ongoing practices as the causation of practices in the olden times. Nonetheless, in the view point of cultural-historical activity theory, the endeavor to preserve the inhabitants making the new way as their alternative in the social and development process instead of visioning the technology and new materials as their tools of practices as threads. The adjustment process

in one society can be seen as a historical form of human learning. This advancement led Tasikmalaya people into another idea of doing their practice and present that they are proud of bamboo material as their identity and the inseparable lives based on their history with bamboo.

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Notes

- ¹ The Cultivation System by the Dutch colonial government policy from 1830 to 1870 in Indonesia for its Dutch East Indies colony; in Indonesia *Tanam Paksa*, the enforcement planning system.
- ² To not to harm the safety, dignity, and safety of the informant, I made the pseudonym names in

- this paper for all the research subjects whom I lived with during the ethnography observation.
- 3 Galunggung Mountain History in *Sejarah Pemerintahan Kabupaten Tasikmalaya dari Masa ke Masa, Pemerintah Kabupaten Tasikmalaya 2014* (The Report of the History of Tasikmalaya Regency Government from Time to Time) *Bagian Pertama: Masa Kabuyutan Galunggung* (Part One: The History of Galunggung).
 - 4 The data sourced from the interview with the head of the Department for Cooperatives, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, in *Dinas Perindustrian dan Perdagangan, Kota Tasikmalaya* (the Department of Industry and Commerce of Tasikmalaya), March 5th, 2019.
 - 5 *Delapan Komoditi Unggulan* (the eight main commodities) of Tasikmalaya City Small and Medium Enterprises include bamboo crafts, Mendong grass crafts, *Payung Geulis* (Tasikmalaya umbrella), *Kelom Geulis* (Tasikmalaya wooden sandal), batik, embroidery, wood processing, and Tasikmalaya traditional foods.
 - 6 The Dutch Ethical Policy was the official policy of the colonial government of Indonesia for four decades from 1901 until the Japanese occupation of 1942.
 - 7 Mrs. Mima and Mrs. Tika, in-depth interview with the author in Sundanese language when they were cooking for Eid dishes, August 2018, Muncang, Tasikmalaya.
 - 8 Mrs. Mima and Mrs. Tika, in-depth interview with the author in Sundanese language when they were cooking Eid dishes, August 2018, Muncang, Tasikmalaya.
 - 9 Interview in Bahasa Indonesia with Mr. Ahmad, the head man of one of citizen associations in Sukarasa, Tasikmalaya City, August 2018.
 - 10 Huge tools such as *tampir* (flat tray), *aseupan ageung* (cone-shaped woven bamboo), and *jodang* (tray to dry up foods) are needed to process Eid dishes; only used for special occasions.
 - 11 For the details of the history about *bambu runcing* or spiked bamboo brigades in Indonesia, see Cribb 2009, pp.156–170 (The Guerrilla Division of the Bamboo Spears).
 - 12 Mrs. Sari and her daughter, interviews with the author in the woven bamboo kiosk, August 2018, the Cikurubuk, Central Market of Tasikmalaya.
 - 13 Based on the in-depth interview with *Urang Tasik* Community, March 2019.
 - 14 Based on the interview with the Head of Department of *Dinas Perindustrian dan Perdagangan, Kota Tasikmalaya* (the Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Department of Industry and Commerce of Tasikmalaya) , March 5th, 2019. The Tasik Creative and Craft Festival (TCCF) was first intended by the Tasikmalaya City Government to prevent inflation in Tasikmalaya and its surrounding area by increasing the regional income through the creative industry sectors with the help of the Bank Indonesia as the main sponsor.
 - 15 For the details of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, see Engeström 1987; 1990; 1999; 2015.

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