



The genealogy of the roles of *Uang kepeng* in Balinese community

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Abstract

Uang Kepeng is a coin that originally comes from China and has been known for long time in Bali. The coin has a round shape with diameter of 5 cm and a rectangle hole in the center. The genealogy of the roles of *uang kepeng* in Balinese society has been studied. The study used a qualitative research method that was based on paradigm of Foucault's genealogical theory and theory of post-modernism esthetics. The results showed that although *uang kepeng* is no longer used as a legal medium of exchange, it still play important roles in Balinese society life. *Uang kepeng* is used in various Balinese society activities, including as a medium in Hindu religious ceremonies and as cultural objects such as a tool in a game and as an amulet. Moreover, the development of tourism industry based on local culture in Bali has significant impact to the role of *uang kepeng* in creative industry such as a souvenir and accessories.

Keywords: genealogy, roles, uang kepeng, cultural object, Balinese society

Introduction

Uang kepeng or *pis bolong* or *jinah bolong* (Balinese coin) is the name of a coin that was once used as a legal medium of exchange (cartel money) in a transaction in Bali. *Pis* or *pipis* is a Balinese word that means money. The word *pis* is more commonly used up to the present. *Bolong* is a Balinese word that means hole. This coin has a round shape with a hole in the center which has a shape of a rectangle or equilateral quadrangle shape^[1].

Uang kepeng that circulates in Bali was originated from China and has been issued by Zhou dynasty (1027-221 BC). The round shape symbolizes the sky or heaven, while the quadrangle hole symbolizes the earth. The concept of the earth and the sky then became the ideology of China that stands on *Tian Ming* (the mandate from the sky), that is the highest source of the authority of the government is the king of the heaven^[2].

The dynasties that ruled in China always used the coin that they called according to the identities of the dynasties. *Ban-liang* coin is the coin made by Qin dynasty (pronounced Chin, 221-206 BC). *Wu zhu* currency was issued by Han dynasty that ruled in 206 BC-220 AD. Kai yuan tong bao currency was issued by Tang dynasty in 618-907 AD. In 960-1279, Song dynasty minted 137 types of coins each was written using different styles in accordance with the periods of their issuance. Ming dynasty (1368-1644) minted coins with *da zhong* and *hong wu* characters.² These coins from Ming dynasty were then exported in a great number overseas, including to Indonesia.

The coins entered Indonesia, especially Bali as they were carried by Chinese merchants. This indicates that the trade relation between Bali and China has existed since Han dynasty. However, a long time before that time, Chinese culture, especially the bronze culture has been known in Bali in the prehistoric time. A proof until now that has remained is "*bulan pejeng*", that is a bronze kettledrum which has been made sacral and is placed in Penataran Sasih Temple, Pejeng Village, Gianyar Regency^[3].

The coins that are circulating in Bali also came from Japan and other areas of the Indonesian archipelago. The types of *pis bolong* (coins) include *pis gebogan*, *pis jarring*, *pis lumrah*, *pis krinyah*, *pis koci*, *pis lembang* and *pis wadhon*.^[1] These coins are differentiated based on thickness, diameter, and character written in the front surface (sleh-obverse) and the back surface (trep-reverse).

In the past *uang kepeng* in Bali was used as currency, thus a lot of them circulated in the centers of trade like Buleleng, Blanjong and Sanur harbors. *Uang kepeng* had functioned as medium of exchange until 1950s, when the government of Indonesia issued *uang RIS* (Republic of United States of Indonesia's currency) and *ORI* (Republic of Indonesia's currency) as legal currency to replace *uang kepeng*^[4].

Although no longer used as medium of exchange, *uang kepeng* keeps on circulating in Balinese community life until the present time. This cannot be separated from the use of *uang kepeng* in various activities of Balinese community, thus it is interesting to investigate from the genealogical perspective the roles of *uang kepeng* in Balinese community. The study on genealogy of the roles of *uang kepeng* is related to the role of power that is very rare. In the meantime, the presence of *uang kepeng* has only been studied from the aspects of history, function in rituals, and a handicraft object.^[1, 2, 5] In relation to this, then this article discusses two main problems, first, the genealogy of the roles of *uang kepeng* in Balinese community and second, *uang kepeng* as a cultural industry.

The theoretical approach used in this study was genealogy theory.^[6] By sticking to this theory an assumption can be made that the use of *uang kepeng* in Balinese community cannot be separated from various ideologies or powers that play their role behind it. When *uang kepeng* is presented as commodity in the form of

souvenir it can be studied using the theory of post-modernism esthetics^[7].

Methods

The study was carried out in Kamasan village, Klungkung, Bali. It used a qualitative approach based on the paradigm of genealogical theory^[6, 8] and postmodernism esthetics.^[7] The object of this study was *uang kepeng*.

The data on the use of *uang kepeng* in ceremonies in Hinduism, as a cultural object, and as material for making souvenirs were obtained emically through an in-depth interview with informants, who among others were *uang kepeng* craftsmen, religious figures, *bebotoh* (gamblers) and cultural observers. Data were also obtained from observing works made of *uang kepeng*. A document study was done of literature that expresses the presence and uses of *uang kepeng* in Balinese community. The emic approach was combined with an etic approach so they formed a narrative to answer the problems under study.

Results and Discussion

After the government of Indonesia issued rupiah as a legal medium of exchange, then *uang kepeng* lost its function as medium of exchange. However, *uang kepeng* keeps circulating in Balinese community. Based on our study, we found that this cannot be separated from Hindu ceremony activities and Balinese tourism as cultural objects.

Uang Kepeng as medium of Hindu Ceremonies

Hindu community thanks God as creator of the world and its contents by performing *yadnya*. The word *yadnya* means the ceremony of offering, a person who is holding the ceremony of offering or something related to an act of main an offering while the holy book of *Bhagavad Gita* explains that *yadnya* is an act that is done earnestly and with the awareness to make an offering to God. Thus, *yadnya* is a sacred offering done earnestly and consciously *yadnya* consists of five types, namely *dewa yadnya*, *rsi yadnya*, *pitra yadnya*, *manusa yadnya*, and *bhuta yadnya*^[9].

In doing *yadnya* one needs to have holy attitude and mentality. In addition, one also needs medium called *upakara* or *sesajen* or *banten* (offerings). Offerings are offered as the form of devotion and gratitude to *Sang Hyang Widhi* (God). Offerings consist of various kinds of materials, like leaves, flowers, fruits, snacks, rice, arranged in an artistic form. Another element that is important enough in an offering is *uang kepeng*. *Uang kepeng* in offerings functions as *sesari*. *Sesari* comes from the word *sari* which means core. For example, the core of a flower is called pistil, stamens, or pollen. The core of an egg is yolk. In short, *sari* is the core of an object. The core of an offering is the most respected value of worship to God. In an offering, the most respected value is objectified as *uang kepeng*.^[1] Although the coins issued by the government of the republic of Indonesia circulate abundantly, Balinese prefer *uang kepeng* as *sesari*. The use of *uang kepeng* as *sesari* might be caused by the philosophical meaning of *uang kepeng* with its round shape symbolizing the sky and the square hole in the center symbolizing the earth^[2].

As the symbol of the earth and the sky, then *uang kepeng* can be interpreted as temporariness and eternity. Temporariness and eternity are a binary opposition that relate to each other in an

effort to reach oneness with The Absolute (God).^[10] The oneness with The Absolute can be reached through a long struggle. Hinduism has five bases of belief or faith called *panca sradha*, as the way to be one with God. *Panca sradha* consists of five beliefs, i.e. belief in the presence of God or *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi* (*Widhi Sradha*), belief in the presence of *atma* (spirit) (*Atma Sradha*), belief in the presence of *karma phala* (*Karmaphala Sradha*), belief in the presence of *punarbhawa* or *samsara* (*Punarbhawa Sradha*), and belief in the presence of *moksa* (*Moksa Sradha*).^[11] *Punarbhawa* means a repeated birth which is also called *penitisan* or *samsara*. *Punarbhawa* or *samsara* occurs because of the presence of *karma* law. *Karma* law in Hinduism is known as *karma phala*, that is, an argumentation that teaches that every act will be followed by its result. The result of an act can be enjoyed in this life, in the hereafter, or in the future life. *Karma* law causes *atma* (spirit) to return or to be reborn in an effort to correct its deeds. Rebirth is *Samsara* (misery) because humans are affected by the mortality or the transience of this world. In Hinduism, the ultimate purpose of humans is to reach a freedom or *moksa*. *Moksa* is the term to call the status in which the spirit of a human has become one or unite with God. The spirit will no longer be born, since it has been able to liberate itself from Tri Guna: *rajas*, *tamas*, and *satwam*^[12].

In addition to function as *sesari* (offering), *uang kepeng* is also designed into *praraga* (human form). *Praraga* is a representation of god *Rambut Sedana*, that is a god who creates and regulates economic matters.¹ In relation to god *Rambut Sedana*, Howes mentions it as an art with iconographic dimension^[13] In the iconographic art, the form represented contains religious meanings and symbols.

In putting *sesari* in an offering or in using it as *praraga* from an arrangement of *uang kepengs* one takes the aspects of beauty and luxury into consideration which are important since as the form of worship to *Sang Hyang Widhi* (God) it has to be the most beautiful and the most luxurious. Offerings that consist of flowers, fruits, decoration made of young coconut leaves are arranged in such a way to look beautiful. A temple as God's house in His manifestation as god, is decorated to have a luxurious impression. Offerings are made to look beautiful and luxurious not only to meet a personal or Balinese community's esthetical motivation, but also as a way for an artist to make himself or herself close to God as the source of beauty, that is *satyam* (truth), *shiwam* (purity), and *sundaram* (beauty).^[14] *Satyam* and *shiwam* are related to the attitude and behavior in working as an artist which is expressed through the aspect of *sundaram* (visual beauty).



Fig 1: Types of products and uses of *uang kepeng* in Balinese community life

Uang Kepeng as Cultural Objects

In Balinese society, we found that *uang kepeng* as a cultural object is commonly used as a medium in some games and as amulets.

Uang Kepeng as a Medium in Games

Playing is one of a need in the human life. This cannot be separated from the existence of human being as *Homo ludens*, that is, creatures who like to play or to create games. Huizinga mentions that one of the words associated with games in English is fun.^[15] Game can also be associated with the word *lila* in Sanskrit, which means shaking and swinging, especially when it is expressed from light, cheerful, relaxed, not important.^[15] The fun and *lila* aspects are essential in a game, so that the players can forget something (*lali*: in Balinese), so for temporary they can forget life everyday problems.

Games or playing cannot be separated from spare time, since in games, the players can contemplate or reflect on their experiences and realities in life in the leisure.^[16] According to Pieper, leisure is not identical with laziness. It is a form of celebration and liberation, so that it produces games and creativity.^[16] Games and creativity are important factors and very crucial in culture. By using leisure time, human beings seek for peace, contemplation, and seriousness in life. In leisure time, human beings can awaken their identity and self-awareness of a given situation. Related to this, then the contemplative attitude is the door for human beings to a new freedom^[16].

As explained above, games are aimed at having pleasure by filling the leisure time. Games can be done alone and together (in group). Balinese have a variety of games that are done alone and in group. In the agricultural time, games are usually done after the harvest time and while waiting for the next planting time. This time is a leisure time for the farmers who fill it with games. Some Balinese games use *uang kepeng*. A variety of forms of games use *uang kepeng* like *pinceran* or *tokekan*, *kelesan* or *kobokan*, *metogtog*, *matembing*, *macontok*, *macontok pulang*, *malekenting*, and *materi*^[1]. Each of these games has its own rule and procedure.

Games that use *uang kepeng* are related to Gadamer's idea in Simon are the mode of being.^[16] This is supported by Gadamer's concept about game or play. First, in a game, the player feels relaxed since it is done as a form of recreation. The player does something only for the sake of the game itself. The center of the activity in a game is not he himself or she herself, but the game itself. Secondly, the game is an event that does not depend on what and who are involved, but the event occurs for the sake of itself. In a game, the player can express, realize, and play his or her authenticity and build equality and mutual interactivity. Third, a game is the reality of uniting, mutual relatedness, and mutual dissolution in a larger reality than the human subject. Fourth, games are the representations for others. In games, the spectator and the player determine each other. In this case, the peak of the pattern of a game as the mode of being is the process of playing in which human beings keep on surpassing themselves. Through a game, the player forgets for a while his or her daily routine or refreshes himself or herself from weariness so that the game refreshes his or her mind. It is in this context that the concept of game or play is associated with leisure time.

Games that used *uang kepeng* then changed into gambling since in the game, the players bet some money. Every type of games

that use *uang kepeng* has its own rules. The amount of the bet depends on the agreement among the players.

Uang Kepeng as Amulet

Van Peursen divides human ways of thinking into three stages: mystical way, ontological, and functional.^[17] In the mystical way of thinking, human beings are ruled by supernatural power and the way to overcome problems is by being guided by myths. In the ontological way of thinking mystical way of thinking human beings use logical thinking by involving their mind and release themselves from the supernatural power. In the functional way of thinking, human beings in living their life is required to mutually contribute with nature.

The functional thinking is the way of thinking of modern people who base their thinking on critical, rational and analytical thinking. In solving the problems in their life, they build beliefs on their reason. Today, the modern way of thinking has affected Balinese way of overcoming problems in their life. They tend to prioritize to adopt the way how Western people think. But in some certain ways, some of Balinese still use mystical way of thinking. This can be seen from the way they solve social problems by believing in fetish, animism, and a dynamism.¹ For instance, Balinese think that there are two types of illnesses: medical and nonmedical. Medical illness is the *sekala* world illness (the temporary world), it is to be treated by a physician. The nonmedical illness is caused by the *niskala world power* (the eternal world), thus, it is to be cured by *usada* or by using the traditional Balinese system.

According to *lontar usada*, there are three types of illnesses: *panes* (hot), *nyem* (cold), and *sebaa* or *dumelada* (hot-cold). The *lontar* that is used as the guide in curing illnesses according to the traditional Balinese guidance is *lontar Tarupramana*. In addition to curing the illness, the traditional healers or *balian* (shamans) also provide the patients with objects to protect them from illness, in the form of *tumbal* and *pekakas* as amulets^[18].

The word *amulet* comes from the Latin word *amuletum* which means an object, whether it is natural or man-made, that is believed to be able to protect someone from problems.^[19] Amulets can take the form of a small shell, a color stone, a root of a tree, a diamond ring, an old horseshoe or *uang kepeng*. Amulets are believed by their users to have power to protect them from danger and to bring happiness and fortune. There are different perspectives toward power of amulets. Some people claim that amulets really have magical power and others claim that they are only an aid to strengthen the courage and belief of the users. When we are talking about amulets they cannot be separated from black magic. Black magic, in its supernatural connotation, is defined as any act that brings change in the other's environment. In other words, black magic is used by its user to control the life of the person whom the user practices the black magic on^[19].

Some of the amulets in Bali use *pis bolong* (*uang kepeng*) with *rerajahan* (drawings that contain a supernatural power) and sacred characters (*wijaksana* and *modre*). *Uang kepeng* that is used as amulet is better known as *pis jimat* which has some types that include *pis Jogor Manik*, *pis Hanoman*, *pis Kresna*, *pis Dedari*, *pis Rama*, *pis Jaran*, *pis Arjuna*, etc^[1]. *Pis jimat* is used as amulet to make the user look charismatic, handsome or beautiful, etc. In short, *pis jimat* is used to fulfill the user's desire

to get what he or she wants. In other words, *pisjimat* is used to fulfill a desire to dominate others. By having the power, it automatically makes him or her decides what is true. He or she will possess the truth. Using Foucault's idea truth is the power itself or on the other way around, power is the truth itself^[20].

Uang Kepeng as Cultural Industry

Uang Kepeng as a product of Balinese culture is inseparable from the development of Bali-based cultural tourism. According to Adorno²¹ cultural industry is a mass culture that is regulated and controlled by the elite at the top (top down), which is different from a folk culture which grows from the bottom (bottom up), that is the folk. Cultural industry is a mass culture that has some characteristics. First, it is produced as a mass product that its taste is easily known by the public at large. Secondly, the production pattern is based on the principle of commoditization, that is, to create a category of esthetics that is commercial for just for the purpose of getting profits. Hence, the esthetical form is created based on the motivation to attract people, the attractiveness (fetishism) to fulfill a low desire. The spell is reached by exaggerating the elements of sensuality, erotic, violence, and mystics.^[21] When an art becomes a commodity, then according to Adorno in Budiarto^[22] the art has lost its prestige. The real art is the basis of theology.

The cultural industry products that use *uang kepeng* come in various types, such as statues, *lamak* (wall decoration) *tamiang* (a decoration that is hung), etc. These cultural industry objects are sold as souvenirs to tourists. The main objective of *uang kepeng* production is to get profits. The appearance is designed in such a way to give pleasure, entertain and attract people. The objects are the result of light imagination, attractive, easy to understand, and satisfy the desire^[21].

In producing the souvenirs from *uang kepeng*, the producers consider some factors such as the aspects of commodification, mass production, and standardization^[23]. Commodification is done by making the souvenirs that are made of *uang kepeng* as commodity to be sold. The mass production of *uang kepeng* for souvenirs can reach a market share as extensively as possible the pattern of its production relies on mechanical system which goes through some work stages. First, the stage of making statue frames such as *tamiang* and *lamak* which are done by male workers. Second, the stage of arranging *uang kepengs* on the framework was usually done by female workers. Third, the stage of installing wooden mask to the statue was done by male workers. Using this mechanical production system enables the huge number of souvenirs made of *uang kepeng* in a short time. The mechanical production system cannot be separated from the influence of mechanical society. According to Daniel Bell, in a mechanical society the production has left the humanistic principle and is aimed at controlling the consumers according to the rhythm of the production^[24].

The principle of standardization in producing souvenirs made of *uang kepeng* aims at producing uniform products, but the meaning is less significant and the quality is very low. This principle of standardization sacrifices the principle of originality and authenticity because of the dominance of the effect of false awareness.^[25] Marx says that false awareness as the product of the capitalist society in which human beings do not act based on their own desires but are motivated by the capitalists' ideology^[26].

Conclusions

Uang kepeng originated from China has various functions in Balinese community, after being used as a medium of exchange. Its various functions include as media (*sesari* and *praraga*) in Hindu religious ceremonies, as cultural objects including a tool in gambling and an amulet, and in cultural industry. The use of *uang kepeng* in the life of Balinese community cannot be separated from the powers behind it, that is, the ideology of offering, pleasure and desire to dominate. When *uang kepeng* is used for making souvenirs, it cannot be separated from cultural tourism industry in Bali. The principle that underlies the cultural tourism industry includes mass production, commodity esthetics, profit seeking motivation and standardization for financial benefit instead of culture conservation.

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