



Acculturation of Indian and Chinese Cultures on Pis Bolong Bali

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ABSTRACT

Kamasan, a village in the Klungkung regency, Bali, not only gains its popularity from classical painting. The Village is also widely noticeable for its metallurgy business, especially *Pis Bolong* Industry. In other areas, the coin is referred to as *Uang Kepeng*. Historically, the existence of *Pis Bolong* or holed coin in Bali was brought by Chinese traders between the eighth to fifteen centuries. It has been circulating as a currency for at least 1,100 years. Today, in Bali, *Pis Bolong* consists of *Pancadatu*, combining several elements such as Gold, silver, copper, zinc, and iron. The coin plays an important role in Hindu religious activities entrenched in Balinese society. However, since the supply of old holed coins cannot fulfill the demand of Balinese ceremonies today, The Government of Bali decided to reproduce the holed coin. It is viewed as a solution to preserve *Pis Bolong*'s existence despite the currency no longer serving as a payment method. Through the Bali Heritage Trust, the officer made the standardized version of the new *Pis Bolong*, which is suggested to consist of the *Pancadatu* element. The first pioneer of *Pancadatu*-based *Pis Bolong* manufacture is UD. Kamasan, one of the home-industry businesses from Klungkung that supplies the needs of *Pis Bolong* on the island. Creativity in creating *Pis Bolong* handicraft products, in addition to elevating the current value of *Pis Bolong*, also acts as an effort of cultural preservation that reflects the local wisdom of the Balinese people.

Keywords: *Pis Bolong*, Bali, *Pancadatu*.

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BACKGROUND

Kamasan, a village in the Klungkung regency, Bali, not only gains its popularity from classical painting. The Village is also widely noticeable for its metallurgy business, especially *Pis Bolong* Industry. In other areas, the coin is referred to as *Uang Kepeng*. Historically, the existence of *Pis Bolong* or holed coin in Bali was brought by Chinese traders between the eighth to fifteen centuries. It has been circulating as a currency for at least 1,100 years. Then, in the 1970s, the currency no longer served in any transactions. However, thanks to King Jayapangus' decree in the twelfth century, the *Pis Bolong* has served as ceremonial instruments in many Hindu rituals.¹ Today, the acculturation from the ancient Indian metallurgy technique leads the coin to be composed of *Panchdhatu* or *Pancadatu*. The term refers to five metal alloys traditionally identified as an alloy of Gold, silver, copper, brass, and iron. Widely used in Hindu metallurgy culture, it is said that *Panchdhatu*-based object brings balance in life, self-confidence, good health,

fortune, prosperity, and peace of mind. The combination of this metal is used to make Murti and Hindu temple jewelry in India.² In Bali, under the guidance of the Bali Culture office, The Bali Heritage Trust initiated the *Pancadatu*-based *Pis Bolong*. The institution made the act to increase the supply of *Pis Bolong* and produce it in a way that followed cultural and religious guidelines.

Pancadatu with its Religious Value

Since the ancient Hindu civilization in India, the knowledge of metallurgy has been inherent in many social activities. Various metals-related activities are listed in *Shilpa shastras*, a collection of ancient texts describing arts and crafts, including the design rules, principles and standards. Likewise, the term *Pancadatu* is regulated and becomes an umbrella for many manufacturing techniques. *Shilpa Shastra* is a manual book for Hinduism sculpture and iconography in the context of architecture and sculpture of Hindu temples. It discusses the

sculpture's proportions, compositions, principles, meanings, and architectural rules. Hindu Vedas, especially *Atharwa Weda* and *Sthapatya Veda*, also describe various types of arts and crafts in their discussion about *Shilpa Shastra* and *Yantra Sarvasva*. Further, other texts, such as *Shilparatna* and *Manasara*, explain the working process and principles of metallurgy, such as *Pancadatu* and *Ashtadhatu*, the eight metal alloys.

Maha Rsi Markandeya, a priest from India, traveled to Bali in the fifth century. Balinese Hindu scholars believed him to be the first prominent figure to introduce the *Pancadatu* concept in Indonesia, especially in Bali. Various historical records, such as *Lontar* and *Purana*, scattered on the island of Bali, mentioned that The Priest had visited some Java Island destinations as a part of His holy pilgrimage, *Dharmayatra*. Firstly, he was said to visit Dieng Mountain in Central Java, continued his travel to the east, and arrived at Mount Raung, East Java. He spent a few years at Mount Raung, established

an *ashram* and gained followers. *Wong Aga*, the chosen one, was an identity attached to the priest's followers. Rsi Markandeya and his 800 *Wong Aga* followers traveled to Bali on a mission to spread Hinduism and teach agricultural techniques, dams and irrigation. According to the record, at that time, the island was said to be spiritually empty. Therefore, he believed *Yadnya*, a sacred offering ceremony, must be conducted to return the place to its

essential state. However, the task failed because all his followers were wiped out by the plague and terror of evil spirits, which forced the Rsi to return to Java Island.

He made his second visit to Bali several years later. However, on this second visit, Markandeya only allowed his 400 followers to join his journey. They traveled to the eastern mountain of Bali, Mount Tohlangkir, today is known as Mount Agung. Here, the priest conducted a *Yadnya* ceremony, *Agni Hotra*, and planted *Pancadatu* on the base of Mount Tohlangkir. Markandeya earthed the metals as five separate metal plates of Gold, Silver, Bronze, copper and iron known as *Peripih*. The *Peripih* was carved with holy letters, unlike the common perception that said *Pancadatu* should be made into a single-plate alloy. The ceremony proved to be successful. All of Rsi Markandeya's followers survived and today are residing in Bali Aga villages such as Tenganan and Trunyan. At the point where *Pancadatu* plates were buried, it became known as the name *Wasuki* or *Basukian* means salvation. Hitherto, the point is also where Besakih, the mother temple on Bali Island, is erected.⁴

Moreover, Maha rsi Markandeya is the first figure to refer to the island by the name of Bali, which means the sacred offering. A place where all will be

safe and prosperous by carrying out the sacred offerings or *yadnya*. Since that time, *Panchdatu* has been vital in Balinese Hindu rituals, especially in establishing new temple buildings. The metals are believed to cleanse the building as well as activate the building's divine aura. Not long after the successful ritual, they headed to the western area, where they arrived in a deep woodland area with a flat land contour. It was there that he and his students spread the forest. The flat and spacious area was called *Puwakan*, turned into *Kasuwakan*, and eventually voiced as *Subak*. Today, *Subak* is known as a traditional agricultural system from Bali that UNESCO has acknowledged.⁵

Balinese people live their life in a socio-religious society. They value culture, customs, and traditions as identity, thus inseparable from their life. Putra Hartawan (2011: 1) states that in the life of the Balinese people, they uphold three essential values that society should maintain sustainably. These three frameworks encompass *Tatwa* or philosophy, then morals or ethics, and the last is rituals. Balinese people strongly uphold their religious traditions or rituals as. Thus, the attribute as an island of God attached in Bali for decades. The people pour their devotion through rites and religious ceremonies as gratitude to God Almighty and all His manifestations.⁷



Figure 1.³ A Newly Manufactured Pis Bolong with 'Ang-Ah' Scripts (Gold Color, Above), And Two Older Version of Pis Bolong, With Chinese Inscriptions (Bronze Color).



Figure 2.⁶ *Peripih Emas*, Gold plate with holy letters carved. Gold is one of the metal elements that exist in *Pancadatu*.

Pancadatu-based Product Innovation

The unique story regarding *Pancadatu* inspired some creative industries to create *Pancadatu*-based products as handicrafts. One of the products is the composition modification of *Pis Bolong*. In Bali, there are several classifications of *Pis Bolong* found in Indonesia. First, the original Chinese, Japanese and Vietnam coins with their letters. Second, the locally adapted holed coin with ancient Javanese or Arabic symbols and decorated with shadow puppet characters. And the last one is a newly produced holed coin to fulfill Balinese market demand.

Commonly, people can find three common Chinese-influenced coins in Bali, ranging from the Tang Dynasty in the 8th to 10th century AD, the 13th century Ming Dynasty to the 14th century AD, and the 17th century Qing Dynasty to the 20th



Figure 3.¹⁰ CEO of UD. Kamasan, Mr. Andika Prayatna Sukma.



Figure 4.¹⁴ UD. Kamasan in Klungkung manufactures Pis Bolong and produces various ceremonial instruments such as *Salang*, Holy Water Bowl, *Genta*, Trisula Spears, and Knitted Pis Bolong Statue, with Pancadatu-based materials.

century AD. Hitherto, Balinese people view the coin as an instrument in religious ceremonies.⁸ Widana and Sulistyawati in Arisanti (2015: 4) estimated that Pis Bolong started to circulate in Bali around the seventh century AD and acted as one of the widely accepted currencies.

Meanwhile, on the Sukawana inscription, dated 882 AD, the coin served as currency and ceremonial instruments. The inscription's claim is supported by the finding of Pis Bolong in many excavation sites on the island. Therefore, its significant role in Balinese society is undoubted. For instance, in 2008, when people at Kintamani village conducted renovation for Bukit Legundi Cemeng Temple at the northwest side of the Caldera Mount Batur Kintamani, they found some ancient holed coins at three different points around the building. Then, an excavation at Gelang Agung's site by the Denpasar Archeology Center in May 2013 found 322 Chinese and Vietnamese coins scattered around the site. The site was estimated from the 14th century AD.⁹

Albeit in 1951, the Indonesian government issued a regulation that ORI (Oeang Repoebluk Indonesia) as a legitimate currency, Pis Bolong has survived as a part of religious ceremonies in Bali (Mudra, 2007: 4). Every Yadnya ceremony, such as the Ceremony of *Dewa Yadnya*, *Rsi Yadnya*, *Pitra Yadnya*, *Manusa Yadnya*, and *Bhuta Yadnya* require the usage of Pis Bolong.¹¹ To meet the needs of Pis Bolong in Bali, since 2003, the Bali Provincial Government, through Governor's Decree No. 68 of 2003, established the Bali Heritage Trust, a Governmental-based institution in charge of preserving Balinese culture. One of its cultural preservation efforts is to reproduce Pis Bolong, which plays an important role in the Hindu religious ritual in Bali. The Bali Heritage Trust Institute under the Bali Culture Office, led by the late Ida Pedanda Made Gunung concurred with the standardized written script for the newly produced Pancadatu-based holed coin. It is the holy script of *Ang* and *Ah*, representing duality and the foundation aspect of the universe on the fore, and five syllables of *Sa*, *Ba*, *Ta*, *A*, and *I*.¹² According to Hindu literature, the holed coin must consist of Pancadatu,

representing five supreme Gods. The iron symbolizes the strength of Lord Vishnu, the ruler of the north, with His black color. Silver represents the power of the Lord Iswara in the east; Copper symbolizes the power of lord Brahma in the south. Then, the yellow color, attributed to Lord Mahadewa in the west, manifested in the existence of Gold. And the last, bronze, represents Lord Shiva as the central ruler of the cardinal points.

Manufacturing new Pis Bolong is viewed as an effort to preserve the ancient cultural heritage. Moreover, due to the increasing number of Balinese people, the demand for Pis bolong follows. However, the availability of the old circulated holed coins was limited and needed to be well distributed, especially to meet the needs of religious ceremonies. UD. Kamasan is one of the renowned Pis Bolong manufacturer pioneers in Bali. Since 2004, the company has produced millions of holed coins to fulfill religious ceremonial demands on the island, according to the CEO of UD. Kamasan, Andika Prayatna Sukma, explained that He and His father conducted much research to manufacture the holed coins successfully. He explained that Pancadatu coins had never been produced before. The challenges come from the fact that each metal in Pancadatu has a different melting point. Andika expressed gratitude that he and his father finally found a way to manufacture the coins successfully. He mentioned that the coin materials are sourced from used goods, such as gold and silver ores, door handles, taps, bicycle dynamos, and unused motorcycle wheels or cars. The material for making the Pis Bolong consists of 25% copper, 50% brass, 15% tin, 9% aluminum, 1% gold, and silver. The amount used can vary, depending on the availability and suitability of the material. Since then, his business has grown exponentially hitherto. The company manufactures Pis Bolong and produces various ceremonial instruments such as *Salang*, Holy Water Bowl, *Genta*, Trisula Spears, and Knitted Pis Bolong Statue, with Pancadatu-based materials.¹³

Bali has great potential for the development of the creative economy. The island has creative human resources with cultural diversity, a hub for

international societies and a wide range of raw materials available. The process of producing Pis Bolong from recycled metals, then developed into an aesthetic handicraft for ceremonies or souvenirs, showed a promising opportunity that a creative individual could utilize anything with creativity. During the waves of the creative economy, creativity and cultural background supported by the source of materials and the environment became the main capital in economic development. The high creativity of Balinese artists with a cultural background from generation to generation makes Pis Bolong a piece of artwork with high economic value yet preserves cultural heritage.¹⁵

Pis Bolong is now transformed into a variety of jewelry, Balinese dancer statues, idol statues, wall hangings frames with various designs, table decorations, and hanging decorations. Creativity in creating pis bolong as a handicraft product, in addition, to elevating the current value of Pis Bolong, also acts as a form of cultural preservation that reflects the local wisdom of the Balinese people. Local wisdom in the broad sense also includes various patterns of actions and cultural results of its material and can be stalled into all cultural heritage, tangible and intangible.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Pis Bolong, which Chinese traders introduced in ancient times, has existed. Today, in Bali, Pis Bolong consists of Pancadatu, combining several elements such as Gold, silver, copper, zinc, and iron. The coin plays an important role

in Hindu religious activities entrenched in Balinese society. However, since the supply of old holed coins cannot fulfill the demand of Balinese ceremonies today, The Government of Bali decided to reproduce the holed coin. It is viewed as a solution to preserve Pis Bolong's existence despite the currency no longer serving as a payment method. Through the Bali Heritage Trust, the officer made the standardized version of the new Pis Bolong, which is suggested to consist of the Pancadatu element. The first pioneer of Pancadatu-based Pis Bolong manufacture is UD. Kamasan, one of the home-industry businesses from Klungkung that supplies the needs of Pis Bolong on the island. Creativity in creating Pis Bolong handicraft products, in addition to elevating the current value of Pis Bolong, also acts as an effort of cultural preservation that reflects the local wisdom of the Balinese people.

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