

Sarawak Bamboo Craft: Symbolism and Phenomenon

Mohd Zaihidee Arshad & Izani Mat Il M.Hum
Department of Art and Design, Faculty of Art, Computing & Creative Industry,
Sultan Idris Education University, 35900 Tg. Malim, Perak. Malaysia

Abd. Halim Ibrahim
Department of Language, Faculty of Language and Communication,
Sultan Idris Education University, 35900 Tg. Malim, Perak. Malaysia

Abstract. The relationship between human beings and their environment has stirred reactions between nature and the development of mind and actions that can be discussed using interdisciplinary approaches such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and history, in understanding human thinking and behavior. A psychological approach is intended to evaluate the individual choices and needs in society. A sociological approach details the various patterns in the social organization. An anthropological approach is tied with culture and belief to fulfil human needs which are based on their habitat, while a historical approach looks at the development which is related to the past. Dimensions of experiences, order and logic, selective elaboration and expressions are used to analyze the bamboo craft of Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh societies in Sarawak long-houses. The existence of constitutive, moral, expressive and cognitive symbols has been interpreted based on a theoretical framework that has been developed by Langer Art Theory, Parsons Social Theory and Kaplan Culture Theory. The values and meaning formed are interpreted to understand matters related to the lives of villagers and the finding suggests that bamboo craft expresses the multi-ethnic mind and character in the socio-culture of long- houses in Sarawak.

1 Introduction

Phenomenon and symbolism in the minds of humans influence how they react in shaping their lives over the generations. Humans' actions and behaviors shape the physical, social and cultural in seeking to better their lives. Interactions between objects within their living environment creates the formation of diversified human cultures and behavior. The impact is clearly seen in the formation of thoughts, opinions, communication and cultural patterns (Rohidi, 2000). Human life is inseparable from cultural change as culture influences a living and dynamic organism. Through the dimension of time, culture includes arts passed down from one generation to the next as a tradition and heritage through various changes. The culture of arts is a process of adaptation from the human environment and development, thus influences the changes in their socio-culture (Poerwanto, 2000). There are several approaches in understanding our behavior for example, psychological approach can view individual behavior and thinking through the concept of consciousness, desires, goals and options. While sociological approach views humans as social beings in various shades of social organization and able to make any transformation according to their will.

For anthropologists, humans have physical characteristics and various cultural patterns related to their daily practice such as customs, beliefs and rituals, in line with the principles of human development and social purposes to meet the necessities of life, which depends on their environment and surroundings. This creates the natural history of the development of the human group (Phenix, 1964).

Man has various mixed feelings towards the arts. The history of human civilization has existed with arts and keeping pace with the progress of mankind and his time. Humans need art to meet in person to express themselves in terms of being social and able to communicate, providing entertainment and shows (Feldman, 1992). Historians see the development of art connected with the time factor. The past determines the future of the reach of creative-thinking and independence exists through meet-ing the past and future. The existence of art across the history of human civilization that build insight into the world of reality or the world of imagination from the belief that inspiration to strive and create an alternative future.

2 Interdisciplinary Aspect of Key Dimensions of Human Mind and Character

The study on bamboo craft heritage symbolism of multi-ethnic in Sarawak used 4-dimensional framework of human mind and character that are associated with the existence and development of bamboo craft in a multi-ethnic lives of ethnics Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau. Interdisciplinary approaches from different perspectives can be used to understand the human mind and characters which are unique in quality. The basis for developing the human mind and character can be seen through four main dimensions: experience, rules and logic, appropriateness of choice and expression (Bidney, 1996). Experience is a dimension which explains human sensitivity associated with life. Objects in the universe interact through human and natural objects and such changes are due to the self-consciousness of human experiences. Experience determines changes to the objects and the process occurs through systematic thinking (Dewey, 1958). Psychological and biological aspects involved in the process of understanding the experience of human life. In the search results in a reflective experience that creates the basis for developing its self excellence and at the same time show their abilities to discover which reciprocally as well as subject and object. Humans are able to determine the truth and falsehood, ugly, beautiful, and thus enable them to make and expect something, produce creative objects, recognizing the past for future purposes. All perception in the relationship is based on the concept of reciprocity that shows it can be widely accepted and meet the needs of the community. The human environment enables them to be social beings. This theory explains the existence of a society which is built from human characteristics and their interactions with the environment.

Rules and logic that formed ideas are jointed with other frame of minds, thus enabling them to reflect and shape coexistence, leadership patterns, arrangement of rights and duties and then believe and accept it in daily life. In general, thinking is created as long as it is profitable and sustainable in meeting the needs of the community (Kleden, 1987).

The selective elaboration is the basic dimension of the human mind and character that is highly relevant to the development of the cultural heritage of human civilization. Scientists, historians, art scholars and those who excel in their own field are responsible for the community. Their expertises are the appropriate source of knowledge for the needs of the people. The value of life is a concept developed in the minds of a community on what they deem valuable and important in life which are able to serve as a guideline and orientation towards the life of a community. According to Kluckhohn, the value systems of a society depend on the value of the five main aspects, namely: the value of human life, the value of human creativity, the place of man in space and time as well as the value of human relationships with nature (Sujarwa, 2005).

The human need for expression is another natural human dimension that has occurred since the existence of man in this world. The discovery of traces of arts in the caves of France, Spain or others, clearly shows that human are sensitive to natural expression. Expression is a way of presenting the mind using symbols such as language, art and so on. Consideration of the human mind to produce something, and foster meaningful relationships with other people to form a human character (Ducasse, 1966).

3 Mind and Character Symbolism: Value and Meaning in The Bamboo Crafts of Sarawak Multi-Ethnic Socio-Culture

3.1 Empirical Aspects

In the lives of Sarawakian multi-ethnics, reactions towards the environment take place in order to address their everyday needs. The abundant of sources from the environment are used to solve their problems. The relationship is reciprocal between humans and their environment which constitutes an integrated system (Beratha, 1991). An holistic approach to the ethnic groups in Sarawak gives functional relationships between components that bind them in an organized union.

Nature shapes behavior in meeting the needs of everyday life and in that context, bamboo is one thing that is synonymous with the nature of thought and the formation of ethnic thinking and creativity. Bamboo is a kind of 'woody grass' plant, a wild plant that can be found in countries like China, India, Japan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Africa, Central America and South America (Brennecke and Wyborne, 1991). Bamboo has become a necessity in the lives of these people for many years. As a consequence, bamboo has established a culture that has a direct relationship with the patterns of thought and behavior of the human socio-culture.

Bamboo has become unusually important to human life, from the food source to home making. From the fulfillment of their needs, it begins to produce arts and has a height of civilization which is reflected through artistic excellence, both in terms of physical as well as in the form of inheritance reasoning (Scheffler, 1997). In the context of the ethnic groups in Sarawak, the two become legacy and have many influences in the pattern and way of life for generations.

Bamboo is a basic material used in the Sarawak multi-ethnic life and becomes integral to the culture with its own values and philosophy to the ethnic groups. The application aspects and requirements are related to metaphysics, epistemology and axiology that combine to form the reality of life in its neighbourhood.

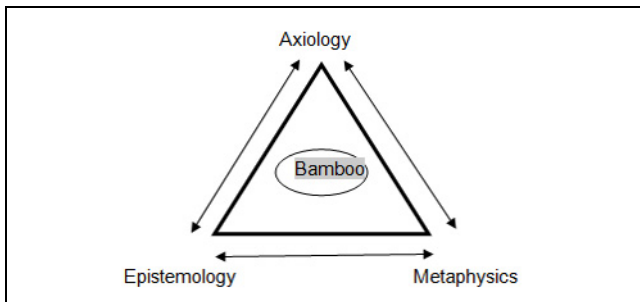


Figure 1. Values and thinking of ethnic Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh about Bamboo

Based on this understanding, the existence of bamboo craft is associated with a basic knowledge of philosophy in terms of epistemology, axiology and metaphysics. The combination of these aspects is construed in Figure 1. The importance of bamboo in a multi-ethnic life in Sarawak has generated patterns of thought and creativity of its own. Various art and non-art objects produced a reaction to the existence of natural objects. Acceptance of the reality of bamboo based crafts form a pattern on opposite sides of life and integrate with each other.

Figure 2 shows the concept of mind and character symbolism of bamboo craft making of the Sarawak multi-ethnics Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh. (B) represents bamboo craft, the concept of the triangle symbolism ethnic life, which upholds the function of metaphysics, epistemology and axiology. All three of these functions exist and integrate reciprocally with each other in shaping the development of History (H), Psychology (P), Sociology (S) and Anthropology (A) in the production of bamboo crafts.

Initially the settlement of ethnic Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh are concentrated in areas close to the river and this is associated with communication facilities, shelter and food sources. The needs to fulfill basic needs creates an open mind and human creativity in order to solve problems. Bamboo becomes one of the natural resources that aids life. In order to fulfill needs, the people are forced to create and produce creative tools.

The need to solve communication problems and to move from one place to another has sparked the creation of a bamboo raft. Bamboo is also used to catch fish which is the main food source for ethnic groups who live near the river. Their use of bamboo spears or harpoons has led to the creation of new 'traps' or 'fish traps' to catch fish. The catch is stored in a bamboo 'fish trap', which becomes a piece of equipment for keeping the fish fresh and alive in the water.

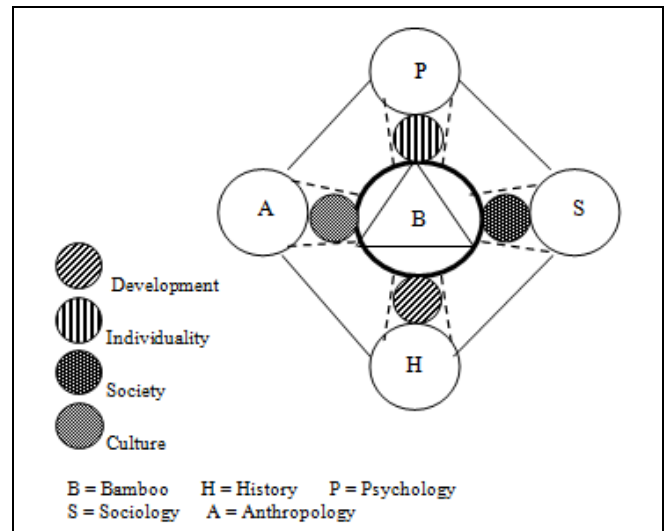


Figure 2. Concept Symbolic Phenomena of Sarawak Bamboo Craft

Humans need entertainment in everyday life. The creation of entertainment depends on the strength of individual thought and creativity of natural materials found in the environment. The traditional music craft of ethnic Sarawaks is the artistic treasure of pride because of its thinking and high aesthetics values. Bamboo-based handicraft appears normal but has an effect on the formation of cultural identity of ethnic Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau in Sarawak.

The Sarawak multi-ethnic heritage in bamboo crafts can be understood in the context of their own lives, the environment and according to the customs and beliefs that are translated to the needs of their lives. Studies on bamboo craft heritage has a strong relationship with the symbolism of the mind and character of the socio-cultural multi-ethnic communities.

3.2 Theoretical Aspect

"Knowledge of a art, past and present, develops our insight and understanding of man"- Michael J.A. (Michael, 1988)

Art is unique and artistic experiences can provide an invaluable contribution to human civilization and culture. The existence of arts shows which are concrete evidence of arts, a form of human intellect and the ability to develop a civilization. This situation is reflected in every society in the world which has its own arts. Similarly, the bamboo craft heritage of ethnic Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau in Sarawak shows that the development is in line with the requirements of ethnic life.

Art becomes a symbol of human civilization manifested socially or individually, expanding to create a culture within the larger group of social and religious groups (Kleden, 1987). Art is a key instrument in the creation of human civilization which allows human expression and reflection on human activities. Biological, social and spiritual needs are always changing and evolving. This allows for the expression of feelings. Based on this statement, Langer (1976) listed three advantages of art:

- i) Art the express feelings through image of an object allows humans to appreciate the reflection of which understand those feelings.
- ii) The knowledge of arts allow the same feeling as in language, a channel of human sensory experience and observation.
- iii) Art is education for the senses to view nature in an expressive form.

The existence of bamboo crafts among the Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh is intended to meet the needs of everyday life which is symbolic for the cultural and ethnic socioeconomic. They use available natural resources effectively to meet the necessities of life and create a culture of sensitivity as well an observation of the environment in accordance with the customs and norms of the local ethnic groups 'a heritage' a shared learning.

The belief of Sarawak ethnic bamboo craft makers is also connected with nature. They strive to live by adapting to the habitat and the practices which are controlled by the environment in order to create a safe livelihood. This is a normal process which occurs in cultures where acceptance, rejection and screening of basic structure continues to exist in the minds of the ethnic groups (Ahmad, 2003). Language communication becomes the ultimate symbol that shape the perception of the overall environment, developed concepts and perceptions about nature and life in the universe. Whether we realize it or not, the forms of thought in such societies are characterized by the animistic, supernaturalistic and anthropomorphic. Nature determines the state of consciousness and psychological needs (White, 1969), forming a symbol that brings to mind the actions and their character. Taboos that are still practiced in the clearance and processing of bamboo, is associated with trust.

According to their belief in 'Gawai Opar', every form of nature has a soul. Community is still plagued by thoughts of the mythical beliefs of a particular occurrence associated with the environment (Sumintardja, 1989) and they must find the right relationship with its natural strength through a variety of ways. Bamboo is used effectively and in some aspect become taboo, a symbol of cultural values which guides them in producing and using the bamboo crafts.

However, the level of myth in the minds and actions has been significantly reduced and gradually forgotten, as elderly craft makers passed away because the older generation of the craft makers have strong believe in mythology. The existence of a mythical belief is historically linked to animism in the mind and life of the people in order to achieve a safe life (Ahmad, 2003).

The new generation has begun to equate myth with the reality of nature. Their effort is a worthy cause for their ability to find the fact and gain understanding of the forces that move the universe (Sumintardja, 1989). The logical reason is believed to be able to release themselves from the siege forces of nature. The existence of the intended functional bamboo crafts is evidence of a rational society which interacts with their environment.

The atmosphere built forms the symbol of mind and character depth to their homes. They obtained a form of psychological safety relief in their environment, even if the level of education, understanding and experience is limited. Naturally, the requirements of the security is pledged to the feeling in harmony in their environment. Such experiences give an intuitive understanding and response to the mind and character. Bamboo craft makers exist because of the environment that provides the materials and the reflective response of the mind and character create the circumstances for them to use bamboo crafts to suit their needs.

The bamboo craft forms the mind and character as a symbol of cultural artifacts that in turn creates a form of communication, a symbol of intellect, emotions and beliefs. Conscious application of the process of the materials is what gives meaning to life, thus life and the characteristic of that principle in Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau ethnic life in Sarawak can not be separated. This phenomena shows that every action is a reaction to the impression of a symbol (Scheffler, 1997), which forms a day in the life of the bamboo craft maker. Explicitly, the behavior became a symbol of the real world and is related to objects, actions and concepts contained in their environment; while implicit, since the nature of depth that the mind forms symbols and actions that have ties to their psychology and beliefs. Behavioral manifestations of human biological manifestation affect the processes of prevailing cultural traditions (White, 1969). It describes the state of the community's ability to use their knowledge and experience with a direct creation of bamboo craft. The formation of various types of craft show balanced characteristics which have the same form as the culture in their village. The forms and processes applicable to the symbolic shapes are the manifestation of the mind and characters of the bamboo craft makers in Sarawak.

Bamboo is a symbol which explains something to do with the object itself as metaphorical symbols, ideas and creativity, the economy and as the 'image of the poor' (Rao and B., 1996). A system of symbols form the thoughts and actions that give meaning in life by the bamboo craft makers. "We just follow what other people do." "Bamboo is easy to get and not expensive." In symbolic methaphorical expression, it can create a culture that became a symbol of the mind and character of good works in order to control behavior when alone, with family and community environment. Bamboo craft production has inherited form of mind and character symbolism inherent in the means of communication with the ethnic groups. Two questions that arise when studying thinking and action are the ways of communication-related aspects of internal and external aspects of mind associated with culture.

Bamboo craft exists through the process of thinking and through something visual or designed, developed, seen or imagined in the mind of an author.

Spontaneous expression of two bamboo crafts producers and verbal communication that occur, reflects the philosophical meaning of the bamboo crafts produced. In effect, bamboo craft making culture among the ethnic

groups can not be separated from each other bridging cultural heritage.

The bamboo crafts of ethnic Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau in Sarawak form the symbol of the mind and character of their creators and a continuation in the development of knowledge and attitudes, particularly as motivation and encouragement in their moral life. This development occurs and enters their consciousness through the senses. The overall senses involved are vision, hearing, thinking and awareness that can be interpreted through the balance of communication, interwoven together with the bamboo crafts produced. Craft as a symbol can give meaning in life that relate to the thoughts and actions related to the customs of society, religion, beliefs, manners, feelings, patterns of thinking and philosophy of living ethnic groups. Sensitivity to symbols annotated with related objects produces meaning other than in its original form in order to give a deeper meaning in life (Herusatoto, 1984).

The existence and use of bamboo craft as a symbol of the mind and character, shows the creation capabilities of using experience, intuition and awareness of the psychological and sociological experiences of their lives. Requirements to meet the purpose of personal psychology and the social values of the community, shows the uniqueness of the concept of creation with the ethnic cultural symbols of civilization which are produced and accepted as a means of everyday life.

Symbols can be assessed through an objective view, as something that has aesthetic value and through subjective view as something that has feeling. These two features are inherent in creativity and appreciation by others makes bamboo craft meaningful as a symbol of the mind and character of the socio-cultural ethnic Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau in Sarawak.

Symbolism in their life is a form of emphasis or cultural expression that is the legacy of the past. Heritage is consistent with the view that the symbol is formed from the influence of history and everyday life, faith and religion and the environment (Turner, 1967). Ethnic Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau bamboo craft makers consider symbols of thought and action as a sign of sensitivity, an original item, born to remember something special as a giver of meaning to their lives. Thus the nature of context, experience plays an important role as the foundation for evaluation or interpretation of a symbol. Complex systems may not be meaningful to one side and to the other means that have significance in the evaluation or interpretation of symbols referenced. Interviews and observations conducted found that most still remain produces of bamboo crafts in their village. The resulting design remains the same. Explanation of design and character of the craft symbol mind is still maintained as a local ethnic sociocultural pursuit. Although there are changes in several aspects such as time, function and target, the changes did not affect thoughts and actions because many aspects of the culture that inspires bamboo crafts remain unchanged. Total production has not increased, remaining manufacturing techniques, makers consist of the same and the only source of income in some changes. There are socio-cultural impacts of the symbolism of mind and character

that shapes the culture of making bamboo crafts. Symbols in bamboo craft describe certain behaviors or characteristics or mind power integration through an object-expression of bamboo as a natural and even expressions that describe objects or craft ideas generated. Culture is consistent with the nature of emphasis Langer considers as beliefs, judgments and interpretations: "Music is understood as existence in our thinking (Langer, 1976).

The forms of bamboo craft are very complex; there is the science of experience, belief, art, morals, to meet the needs of self-expression and also the will of the people. Tradition and experiences especially family members are heritage for the community. The experience of individuals also contributes to the tradition of the community which suggests the collective thoughts and actions that shape and characterize the symbolic mind and characters in the sociocultural ethnics of the Sarawak bamboo craft makers.

The results of experience has established a system in the formation of sciences in society. The learning process is not formally applied through the heritage of bamboo craft. It takes a long time to process because it involves many areas of specialization in the ongoing social life of the community. A long process has left a deep impression in the mind and character of the craft makers, and establishes symbols that can be interpreted from various angles. In terms of materials, the bamboo has become a symbol of the formation of high consciousness in nature. Consciousness is realized in the mind and character of the people through the use of bamboos that grow wildly in their village. The awareness of bamboo as an important material in craft making creates cultural value and gives meaning in their lives. Bamboo is not just a raw material for craft making but also a very important source of trade and the creation of wealth generated by craft revenue.

Bamboo craft has molded symbols which create forms of community expression in various types of woven baskets. This process of creation continues in shaping the mind and character of individuals which include emotions, feelings, sentiments and self-esteem. Clearly there are also differences in the creation of craft due to individual differences, however, individually integrated with the requirement to make the craft in the community environment.

Individualistic character represents the nature of each ethnic's mind and character and a symbol of a marked formation of mind and character that shape individual psychological symbols that can be interpreted to the symbols of ethnic psychology. These aspects can be seen through objective methods (Vygotsky, 1971) analyze the internal requirements for bamboo craft. This is supported by findings from reference and production of craft makers in Sarawak. The findings also note that the main purpose of making bamboo crafts is to make money, forming a significant value in their lives. Crafts produced in the family tradition has similarities with families in terms of the kind of basket, design, functionality and price. This similarity gives a psychological impact to individual internal psychology in shaping individualism in society which consequently affects the thoughts and actions.

The bamboo craft heritage of the ethnic Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh provide a solid basis for creating a civil society through the open-mindedness of the craft maker. Without being 'open-minded', through cooperation, respect and courtesy, the development of individual psychology will not be nurtured. Education through this learning process enables individuals in the families to form a belief system about craft making in society. The technique of producing bamboo crafts has not changed over time, using the same technique from bamboo splitting technique and measurements. The process of making the craft includes basic skills measuring the thickness of the bamboo and weaving techniques to produce the same kind of craft, without using modern technology. However, there are similarities and differences in terms of the design of one family with another. Changing the design and size will result in the craft having different functions. When craft makers keep the same design, this is the symbol of their minds and character which are based on the balanced concept of value and meaning from the culture inherited since the beginning of craft making.

4 Findings

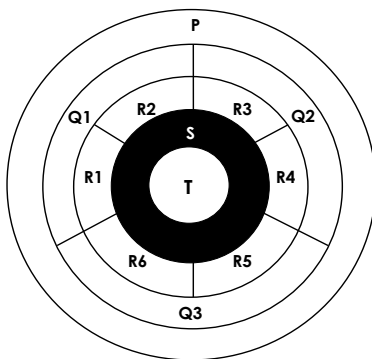


Figure 3. Internal Aesthetic and External Aesthetic Values of Ethnic Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh Bamboo Craft

The geographical area of (P) is the location of long-house belonging to the Iban, Melanau dan Bidayuh ethnic. The long-houses of the different ethnic are related in the characteristic, form and ecology (Q1). Cultured ecology (Q2) and human ecology (Q3) is a source of form external aesthetic factor. These factor are closely related to guiding factor based on physical circle, nature and human development (R1 and R2). Which can be measured from the characteristic of the object and the manipulation into craft (R3 and R4). The situation is also determined by historical legacy of craft which is related to the mind and character of the creator and user (R5 and R6). This is marked by external aesthetic value. The driving force of the internal aesthetic value is in line through the use of bamboo and local utilitarian practice (T), based on the technique, equipment or technology utilized and the awareness and skill of the local

community. In conclusion the design of local craft (S) is the integration and interaction between external aesthetic value factor (P,Q and R) with the internal value factor (T).

5 Conclusion

The ecology of craft makers provides inter-relationship activities between the ethnic groups which create a framework of interdependency in the ecosystem. Bamboo crafts are used in agriculture and others depend on the needs which create social patterns reinforced by cultural heritage and consequently shape the ethnic's group internal aesthetic and external aesthetic values. Bamboo craft has contributed significantly to shape the mind and character of the Iban, Melanau and Bidayuh. This can be clearly seen in the lives of craft makers in all ethnic groups in the longhouses in Sarawak. It influences the patterns of individual thought and actions which creates a formation of relatively local ethnic and cultural pattern.

References

1. Ahmad, H. 2003. Menggali Kembali Pemikiran Melayu. *Simposium Jati Diri Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur.
2. Beratha, I. N. 1991. *Pembangunan desa berwawasan lingkungan*, Jakarta, Bumi Aksara.
3. Bidney, M. 1996. *Theoretical anthropology*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publ.
4. Brennecke, K. & Wyborne, V. G. 1991. *Journal American Bamboo Society*, 8.
5. Dewey, J. 1958. *Experience and nature*, La Salle, Ill, Open Court Pub. Co.
6. Ducasse, C. J. 1966. *The philosophy of art*. By Curt John Ducasse, New York.
7. Feldman, E. B. 1992. *Varieties of visual experience*, New York, H.N. Abrams.
8. Herusatoto, B. 1984. *Simbolisme dalam budaya Jawa*, Yogyakarta, Hanindita.
9. Kleden, I. 1987. *Sikap ilmiah dan kritik kebudayaan*, Jakarta, Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial.
10. Langer, S. K. 1976. *Feeling and form : a theory of art developed from Philosophy in a new key*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
11. Michael, J. A. 1988. *Art and adolescence : teaching art at the secondary level*, New York, N.Y. , Teachers College Pr.
12. Phenix, P. H. 1964. *Realms of meaning : a philosophy of the curriculum for general education*, New York, McGraw-Hill.
13. Poerwanto, H. 2000. *Kebudayaan dan lingkungan : dalam perspektif antropologi*, Yogyakarta, Pustaka Pelajar.

14. Rao, R. & B., I. V. S. C. Bamboo, people and the environment. Vth International Bamboo Workshop and the IVth International Bamboo Congress, 19-22 June, 1995 1996 Ubud, Bali, Indonesia.
15. Rohidi, T. R. 2000. *Kesenian dalam pendekatan kebudayaan*, Bandung, STISI Press.
16. Scheffler, I. 1997. *Symbolic worlds : art, science, language, ritual*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
17. Sujarwa, M. H. 2005. *Manusia Dan Fenomena Budaya: Menuju Perspektif Moralitas Agama*, Pustaka Pelajar.
18. Sumintardja, D. Catatan tentang makna, bentuk dan hiasan seni Bangunan Nusantara. Persidangan Antarabangsa Tamadun Melayu Pertama, 14-16 November 1989 1989 Kuala Lumpur.
19. Turner, V. W. 1967. *The forest of symbols : aspects of Ndembu ritual*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press.
20. Vygotsky, L. S. 1971. *The Psychology of Art*, The MIT Press.
21. White, L. A. 1969. *The science of culture : a study of man and civilization*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.