

## Research Article

# Efforts to Preserve Padung-Padung as a Cultural Identity of Karo Women

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## Abstract.

*Padung-padung* is a large, double spiral-shaped piece of jewelry worn by Karo women in the 19th to 20th centuries. Efforts to preserve this cultural artifact need to be made. This study aimed to describe the various efforts that have been made to revive *padung-padung* in the present. The methods used in this study are literature studies and secondary data collection. The results show that several efforts to lift the existence of *padung-padung* have been made in the creative industry and academics.

**Keywords:** Efforts to preserve, *padung-padung*, cultural identity, Karo women, current context.

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## 1. Introduction

Character of a nation is revealed through its culture. Culture here is seen in the broadest sense, which includes abstract forms of values and concepts, as well as those that are observed, such as behaviour and cultural objects produced and owned by the social entity that owns the culture concerned.<sup>1</sup>This also applies to tribes in Indonesia, including the Karo tribe. As one of the tribes in North Sumatra, which mostly inhabits the highlands, Karo has a great diversity of arts and culture. It includes customs, beliefs, language and script, history, objects of use including jewelry, and others. Karo tribal jewelry, like traditional jewelry in general, is a product with not only general utility value, but also reflection on traditional and religious values. One of the Karo tribal jewelry that reflects the identity of the Karo people, especially Karo women, is *padung-padung*.

*Padung-padung* is a type of large earring made of solid silver in the form of a heavy double symmetrical spiral. This jewelry was worn daily by Karo women in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and has become one of the cultural identities of Karo women at that time. Currently, *padung-padung* are no longer worn and their existence is not widely known by wider community, including the Karo people themselves and the

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younger generation. Even more ironic, other nations appreciate this artifact more as evidenced by the existence of *padung-padung* in foreign museums in a very well-preserved condition. If this can continue, it is feared that it will have an impact on breaking the common thread that connects the origins of our ancestors in the past with the present.

As a cultural identity with historical value for the Karo community, the existence of *padung-padung* needs to be re-evaluated so that its existence can be preserved. Various conservation efforts need to be made for *padung-padung* being recognized by a wider community as one of the Karo cultural artifacts that enrich the cultural treasures of the archipelago. The conservation effort will not be sufficient when being done only by a few people, it requires support from related parties. This study aims to describe the various efforts that have been made to bring *padung-padung* back into the present so that its existence as a cultural identity of Karo women in the past can be recognized by a wider community, especially the younger generation. The results of the study indicate that several efforts have been made, namely applying the concept and development of *padung-padung* in 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional forms in the creative industry. Other efforts in the form of publications have also been made both in academic and non-academic circles. However, these efforts have not been widely carried out yet, thus support from many parties is needed.

## 2. Method

This research was conducted using literature study and secondary data collection methods which were then presented in descriptive analytical manner. Literature study was conducted to gather information related to *padung-padung* and Karo culture. In addition to literature study, interviews with several sources were also conducted to obtain valid information about *padung-padung* and its development. The speakers are Karo community leaders and cultural experts, museum managers, and product designers to represent the creative industry. Secondary data was obtained from a previous study, namely a study entitled *Reviving Padung-Padung to Preserve Karo Tribe Cultural Identity*.<sup>2</sup>In the study, various efforts to preserve *padung-padung* was presented, but did not refer directly to examples of implementing *padung-padung* in 2D and 3D products. The obtained data is then analyzed and presented descriptively.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. About Padung-padung

*Padung-padung* is an earring-shaped jewelry made of silver and sometimes suasa gold, with length ranging from 7.5 cm, 13 cm, and 16.5 cm, weighing about 1.5-2 kg.<sup>3</sup> The uniqueness of *padung-padung* is indicated by its large size and how it is used, inserted into the hole in the earlobe with the other end attached to the cloth covering the wearer's head.<sup>4</sup> The Karo people's closeness to nature has inspired them in many ways, including application in daily objects closely related to their life. Judging from the structure of the shape, *padung-padung* has a basic shape in the form of a spiral adapted from the form of rolled *millipede* or *tangga-tangga* in Karo language.<sup>4</sup> This animal will roll up automatically as a form of self-defense from dangerous attacks that threaten it. This is then interpreted as a hope for Karo women to be able to protect themselves from all threats that come from outside. Another opinion states that the curved shape resembling a spiral in *padung-padung* refers to fern shoots, known as *tulak paku* in the ornamental variety of the Karo tribe (*gerga*).



**Figure 1:** Portrait Karo women wearing *padung-padung*.

*Padung-padung* has a philosophical meaning about marriage life that is exemplary and worthy to be imitated by Karo younger generation and the wider community. *Padung-padung* is given by a father to his daughter on her wedding day as a symbol of her new married status.<sup>6</sup> It contains a message about a father's love for his daughter. Although the Karo people still adhere to a patrilineal system which means that boys have a special position as the successor of the clan, it does not mean that girls have no importance at all. Besides having a philosophical meaning, *padung-padung* symbolizes the social status and wealth of the wearer. Only upper-class Karo women, namely women who represent their lineage, that is, whose ancestors were the founders of the village or important people in the area and come from affluent groups who usually wear them.<sup>7</sup>

The way of wearing *padung-padung* is different between the right and the left ear. On the right ear it is worn towards the back with a slightly up position and on the left ear the *padung-padung* is facing forward in a lower position. This turns out to contain an implicit meaning that symbolizes the life of a marriage that does not always run smoothly. There will always be conditions that are pleasant (symbolized by the position of the *padung-padung* up) and difficult (symbolized by the position of the *padung-padung* to the bottom). Therefore, in a married life, a husband and wife must support each other.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2. Padung-padung Preservation Efforts

When speaking about the preservation of the culture, the first thing to understand is what needs to be made sustainable is the existence of a culture. It means an understanding that a sustainable culture is not a culture that has not changed in any form, but a culture should remain even though the form of expression can always experience a development or even change. The existence of a culture makes it recognizable with a known identity. Of course, there are several dominant characteristics that mark the distinctiveness of a culture. The integrated cultural elements that construct a cultural identity can differ from one culture to another. Components of cultural elements that can be markers of cultural identity are mainly quick to be identified as; patterns of behavior, objects of culture, fashion and a variety of daily objects and so forth.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the results of data analysis, the following are some of the efforts that have been made to revive the existence of *padung-padung* in the present context: First, *padung-padung* as the cultural identity of Karo women became the inspiration in the design concept of the Pusaka Arkāyana wooden watch series (Figure 2) which was issued by the Pala Nusantara brand. Although the design concept of this product is adapted from local Indonesian culture, the shape and color still adapt to recent trend. Pala Nusantara is a design-driven company promoting design values in every product. It bears a mission to make the best use of the country's potential to be transformed into a contemporary product that is accessible for all. Pala Nusantara is a design-driven company promoting design values in every crafted product. Pala bears a mission to make the best use of nusantara's potential to be transformed into a contemporary product that is accessible for all.

Second, the visualization of *padung-padung* in the 2D and 3D forms. The two-dimensional form refers to the application of images or motifs of *padung-padung* on



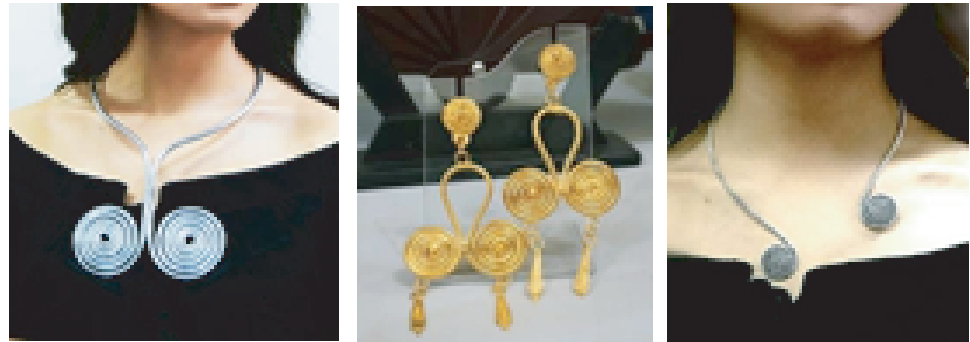
**Figure 2:** *Padung-padung* inspired the product design concept of Pusaka Ārkāyana.

some used items, such as t-shirts, shopping bags, and notebooks. The application of images or motifs of *padung-padung* on these products (Figure 3) will consider the current trends and the targeted segments. For example, the use of attractive colors, eye-catching image or motif positioning, along with product functionality that can span multiple segments at once. Visualization of *padung-padung* on a three-dimensional product must pay attention to several aspects, namely weight, size, material, function, without excluding the symbolic meaning. Examples of its application are on jewelry in the form of chokers and earrings (Figure 4). By applying *padung-padung* motifs in products today, it is expected to raise its existence, which has lost, hence one of the treasures of Indonesian culture can be recognized by the younger generation and preserved, although in a different form.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 3:** Application of images or *padung-padung* motifs on products.

Third, another way to introduce *padung-padung* quickly and effectively is with the creation of character or patrons who are willing to wear the *padung-padung* just like



**Figure 4:** *Padung-padung* spiral shape as jewelry design inspiration.

Karo women in the past. Thus, people can recognize the uniqueness of *padung-padung*, and later will try to find out the 'thing' being worn by the character/idol and what is the story behind the form or shape of the 'object'.<sup>2</sup> In Indonesia, the trend of choosing ambassadors to promote the culture of a region has often been carried out. This can also be applied to revive the existence of *padung-padung*. In this case, the mass media has an important role in disseminating information. From an academic point of view, scientific research and development of *padung-padung* forms can continue to be explored so that people are more familiar with this artifact.

## 4. Conclusion

The efforts to preserve the country's artifacts have often been carried out by activists in the creative industry and academia. However, the highlighted artifacts are still limited to cultural heritage that has been known to many people such as batik, wayang, temples, and others. *Padung-padung* as a cultural identity that is full of meaning has not been widely adopted as an object of research or other conservation efforts. The concern of practitioners in the creative industry and academics in raising *padung-padung* as inspiration for design concepts and the application of their forms to products is an effort to be appreciated. Of course, this will not succeed without the support of interested parties. Therefore, synergy from various groups is needed to preserve this artifact with high locality value.

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