



# Woven Bamboo Objects as A Reflection of Bodily Techniques, In the Case of Industrialized Bamboo Cottage Industries in West Java

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**Abstract.** The physical actions associated with materiality suggest that humans engage in bodily behaviors, encompassing both bodily and instrumental techniques. The process of incorporation between the subjects involves unique emotions, gestures, and movements that have evolved over generations of craft producers. This research explores the concept of materiality within West Java's industrialized bamboo cottage industries, highly valued by local bamboo craftspeople. Modern technology and advanced materials have impacted the local craftspeople in industrialized bamboo cottage industries during their adaptation process. This study proposes that the long-standing connections between West Java craftspeople and bamboo are the key for their ability to withstand numerous challenges in the bamboo industry. Bamboo, in this context serves both as an object and an agent in shaping craftspeople's techniques and skills throughout time. This research delves into the essential concept of mutual construction between humans (subjects) and their environment, employing the perspective of *Matière à Penser* (MaP) to explore "subjectivities." The MaP in this study allows us to highlight the importance of grasping the links between people and their environment in daily life, and emphasizes the role of ethnographic data collection. Despite changes in the bamboo industry, the enduring bond between craftspeople and bamboo has shaped various processes that enable their continued presence in the creative industries.

**Keywords:** Woven Bamboo Objects, Bamboo Cottage Industries, Subjectivities, Material Culture, West Java.

## 1 Introduction: Industrialized Bamboo Cottage Industries in West Java

Based on ethnographic data, this paper delves into the complexities of the bamboo craft industry's production and its importance in West Java. The region of West Java has gained renown for its abundant bamboo resources. Notably, the popularity extends beyond bamboo including *mendong* grass and wood in Tasikmalaya Regency (Sakri, 2009) [1]. The cycle of demands from the local markets and the non-stop production of

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handicrafts in Tasikmalaya met many changes. Regardless, the crafts industries have survived in many types of classification: traditional products/handicrafts, modified traditional products, and modern products made of bamboo (mentioned in the Tasikmalaya Government's Report in 2014) [2]. The difference is the modified ones mostly have more outsider influences such as designers and crafts enthusiasts who have their preferences and procedures in the process of finishing the crafts made of bamboo.

The craft-design movement of academia has been famous among the design practices and has also been looked up to as the "ideal" craft development. Inevitably, this trend of producing bamboo crafts was affected by the demands during the colonial era – both the requirements from the colonial governments and the markets outside of the production area which were now shaped into industrialized bamboo cottage industries (Rahardiani, 2022a: pp.267-268) [3]. The movement from academia in one area of Tasikmalaya (Mandalagiri hamlets) would be seen as the sustained and positive changes since the process involving both parties (craftspeople and the academia) and evolving in decades without vanishing the core of making bamboo crafts values in the hamlet. Further, we will discuss the details about the Mandalagiri hamlets and the crafts movement that has been made, followed by the shifting process of producing bamboo crafts regarding the study of craftspeople's bodily techniques.

The trend of the creative economy movements in Indonesia has been promoted by all levels of government and related stakeholders in Indonesia. Yet, there has been a blurring idea of development among the different parties as well as with the local, regional, and provincial policymakers in West Java. As a result, the movement creates new habits for the bamboo craftspeople who have been expanding themselves from only those of the well-known everyday utensils and local handicrafts. It is worth emphasizing that the 1990s marked the initiation of collaboration between design academics (from Institut Teknologi Bandung, ITB) and craftspeople in the Mandalagiri Hamlets of Tasikmalaya Regency. This collaborative process in crafting has had a significant and enduring impact on the local community for over four decades, continuing into the present year of 2023.

In the case of West Java handicrafts, the concept of "developing" handicrafts still have two-edged blade among craftspeople and policymakers who have top-down movements. Both the policies and the practical sphere of handicrafts do not go along as the fundamental transformation of development once looked promising without giving a certain market for especially craftspeople who only produce traditional objects such as daily utensils. Cernea (1985) [4] in his "Putting People First" also mentioned that there are possibilities of a "half-baked" program that "backfiring inept intervention" such as many cases mentioned in the book. In making the development projects sustained, there are factors that should be considered including sociocultural aspects or the relations between crafts humans and their nature, rather than only concerning the economic situation in one society.

In particular, producing bamboo crafts is part of the daily routines Mandalagiri hamlets people have. The crafts development movements affect the day-to-day levels of the craftspeople living in the cottage industries. In such a case, while waiting for the food cooked in the kitchen, women weavers may slice the bamboo strips in front of their house. However, this behavior is rearranged due to the change of weaving necessities in making modern products for women. Other than adjusting to mastering the new skills to make the hybrid-techniques products made of bamboo, the

craftspeople needed to also adjust their daily routines in their houses – the regular setting of producing bamboo crafts – with other advanced machinery tools installed in their houses. As for the weavers, the traditional bamboo products allow them to work at their houses, while in the modern techniques, they need to continue and process the semi-finished surfaces (*bahan*) at the bigger bamboo business owner in the village. The existing machinery tools appeared to be separating those who are able to invest in buying the machines, whereas the traditional bamboo-producing activities need only hand skills with cutting or slicing tools.

The methods employed focus on how crafts persons “incorporate” and “disincorporate” (Mohan & Douny, 2021) [5] their bodies (containment) in the production of bamboo handicrafts, interacting with the materials and objects surrounding them. Various related and non-human elements in their environment, such as water, air, soil, and the tools they developed during the crafting process, enable the craftspeople's "skin" to dynamically bridge the gap between their bodies and external factors (Rahardiani, 2002b) [6]. As the result, *Matière à Penser* (MaP) which embraces ethnographic data taking as a method to understand the context enables us to perceive the intricate connections between craftspeople and their natural environment, which form an essential part of their everyday lives.

## 2 Crafts World as the Center of Subjectification

The two types of bamboo cottage industries examined in this research are divided into industrialized and traditional, each employing distinct adaptive strategies to cope with modernization in the bamboo industry. The craftspeople possess distinct ways of thinking and hold a unique appreciation for their surroundings compared to outsiders, such as crafts enthusiasts or stakeholders who visit their villages.

**Table 1.** Table captions should be placed above the tables.

	Areas	Specialties	Bamboo as An Agency
<b>Traditional</b>			
<b>Bamboo Cottage Industries</b>	Mandalagiri, Leuwisari, & Padakembang	Forms and weaving patterns	Transferring modern techniques to generate craftspeople's income
<b>Industrialized</b>			
<b>Bamboo Cottage Industries</b>	Mandalagiri, Leuwisari, & Padakembang	Modified traditional products and the original weaving patterns	Management and marketing skills for bamboo crafts businesses
<b>Handicrafts Bamboo Industries</b>	Parakanhonje & Situbeet	Raw bamboo materials; weaving skills and techniques	Management and marketing skills for bamboo crafts businesses; regenerations strategy for craftspeople

Regarding the ongoing trend, the expansion of bamboo crafts types in Mandalagiri and the nearby areas was significant and is related to the research and development project from the non-villagers-crafts-enthusiasts around the areas. The main expansion of the skills was either the original shapes of daily utensils that were combined and modified with new techniques of shaping the frame, or to also turn the object to have a different function as daily necessities. The market for modern products made of bamboo is a new world for the craftspeople to fulfill their demands. However, not all the craftspeople agreed to be involved in the production cycle as it has a very niche market.

Such rectangular baskets (named *pipiti* and *besek*), are now mainly functioned as souvenir and product containers that were previously only food containers. The combination of conventional and modern techniques in shaping bamboo products has been expanding since the trained craftspeople could easily adjust the design from the customers and clients outside of the hamlets. As an effect, the skills of modifying traditional objects into hybrid ones have continued to spread from time to time. The mentioned spreading way skills shape how craftspeople in Mandalagiri structure their socio-economic spheres for decades which keep developing.



**Fig. 1.** (Left) West Java's squared and rectangular-shaped woven bamboo baskets (*pipiti* and *besek*); (Right). modified objects in Mandalagiri-Leuwisari of Tasikmalaya Regency

There are weaving skills that only one specific area such as Mandalagiri who the people are mastering such as *mata itik*, *anyam dadu*, and *mata kebo* weaving patterns. The weaving techniques necessitate high-skilled woven bamboo producers' abilities as in the techniques require details and specific quality of bamboo slices. Not many craftspeople in Mandalagiri master the special techniques. In other meaning, the skills are vanishing day by day in the hamlets. In trading matters, woven bamboo products

that have those original weaving skills will have higher prices than those that have quite common weaving skills such as *anyam kepang* or *anyam dua*.

As for the modified woven bamboo products, the ITB academia intended the idea of modifying the traditional bamboo products that are rooted in the traditional behaviors in the hamlets – that is emphasizing the weaving technique skills. The point was deliberated to keep the familiar feelings of weaving or forming the daily utensils and not to “paralyze” the long-preserved skills in the village. The skills of modifying the hybrid products were first developed in these hamlets from the influence of Mr. Hadiyat (known as *Pak Ayi*) along with his wife at that moment. The present modified products were researched and have long been used by the craftspeople until the present time (Rahardiani, 2022a: pp.151-174) [3]. Thanks to them, the publicly-designed woven bamboo products are spread to Mandalagiri hamlets and the nearby villages involving Leuwisari and Padakembang areas. As time goes by, the trend of having well-designed products combined with natural materials such as bamboo become one preference of producing products that can be found in such modern scenes. Natural materials well-bridging the tradition-themed designs and the industrialized materials such as plastics or electronic components in the design concepts.



**Fig. 2.** (Left) A craftswoman performs to slice and weave in front of the house; (Right) One extended family in Mandalagiri hamlets shares the common knowledge of weaving

In the Mandalagiri’s social sphere, people who produce traditional products such as woven bamboo baskets (*pipiti* and *beseke*) are involved in the cycle of the industrialized bamboo businesses in the hamlets. For at least taking parts as semi-finished (*bahan*) bamboo producers, the industrialized markets are – nevertheless – engaging as local people’s additional income besides fulfilling the traditional products’ demands. In many shapes, woven bamboo basket producers sell their semi-finished (*bahan*) woven bamboo surfaces to the bigger bamboo business owners around Mandalagiri hamlets.

## 2.1 The Interconnectedness of Craftspeople and Their Environment

In response to the available resources, the residents of West Java’s various regencies, particularly Tasikmalaya, have established a longstanding connection with bamboo. Over time, skilled craftspeople have focused on crafting everyday tools from bamboo,

forming the core of their livelihoods. The skillful people are linked to bamboo cultivation and production that has been passed down from one generation to another. This condition makes it a prevalent belief within this community that these skills represent an intangible aspect of their cultural heritage. Concerning the tropical condition of Indonesia, bamboo-producing activities are related to one Tasikmalaya bamboo cottage industry's everyday and occasional routines in both dry and rainy seasons in a year (Rahardiani, 2022b) [6]. Moreover, the article also depicted the process of how the human and non-human factors affect each other in the context of the crafts industry in Tasikmalaya (See "Ecological Factors and People are Interwoven" subsection). The routines they follow serve as the central element for comprehending both the community's attributes and the nature of their crafts.

The connection between bamboo and the techniques of the craftspeople's body is shaped through the process of producing bamboo. An individual establishes their authority by engaging in the processing of materials, which triggers their bodily and behavioral neural systems, all mediated by the objects they create (woven bamboo products). In the shifting industrialized bamboo cottage industries from the traditional ones, the craftspeople have transitioned their sensori-motor and physical actions to involve the use of synthetic ropes in processing, moving away from traditional materials such as rattan. Despite the changes in their environment and in the habits of bamboo making, the feeling of familiarity remained in the craftspeople's bodies and appeared as a tool for adjusting to new technologies in producing modified bamboo crafts.

Crafts world describes the subject (craftspeople), the natural materials, and other environmental factors such as air, water, soil, and other issues in the producing area and its nearby. Craftspeople mostly live around the fertile land where the natural materials are abundant – mostly in more rural and greener areas in the region. Therefore, the connections between humans (subjects), human-object, as well as object to object may appear in natural scenarios in the crafts-producing world. In response to shifts in socio-economic circumstances, craftspeople have extended their skill sets from meeting daily necessities to transforming objects into commodities, effectively shaping their environment through the establishment of bamboo cottage industries that persist to this day.

## **2.2 New Skills and Techniques that Change the Making Behaviors**

The Mandalagiri bamboo sector has embraced new skills and techniques, which forces the craftspeople to continually adapt to shifting market trends. The influences to process bamboo in such sophisticated ways are primarily brought in by some craftspeople who participated in workshops for bamboo crafts. Most of the time, bamboo workshops involve academic and non-academic (governmental) projects in major cities such as Bandung, the Capital City of West Java. Craftspeople obtained new knowledge from the one-time workshop in Bandung through their experiences, which technically started in the 2000s. Since the development of the coiling technique, it has become a new fad among craftspeople returning from workshops to their homes. Along with the skills that

were brought from the outside, the specific on-site development such as Pak Ayi's influence in Mandalagiri appeared to be a sustained crafts development.

As previously mentioned, the academia's influence in the 1990s led to new methods of producing bamboo crafts in Mandalagiri by using bending (heat) techniques to form the circular framing rather than rattan ropes as the craftspeople familiar with producing daily utensil products (*wengku*). The modified bamboo baskets have frames, consisting of the bent inner and outer lines of bamboo stripes that are joined using plastic-based glue. Adapting new skills in producing bamboo, craftspeople in the bamboo cottage industries have then explored new markets as a result of the new aesthetics for the bamboo crafts, which also have a modern and minimalist appeal.



**Fig. 3.** From daily utensils to modified forms of woven bamboo crafts

An important aspect of the new methods that are drawn from earlier academic initiatives is their emphasis on framing abilities. There were various changes that craftspeople made and leaped out of their practiced talents in manufacturing bamboo product forms (everyday utensils) to packaging or souvenirs made of woven bamboo surfaces. When non-natural materials like plastic glue were added, the concepts for creating bamboo crafts were expanded, giving craftspeople greater opportunities to

develop both their existing and new talents. Due to bamboo's tendency to be made rounded, several forms that were previously impossible to construct, such as shaping square frames, can now be used to create bamboo crafts. As a result, there are countless varieties of items available since the development project in the 1990s, which keep growing in response to customer demands that have been met by the crafts peoples' expanded abilities in forming bamboo crafts.

### **3 Deep-Rooted Subjectivities in the Context of Industrialized Cottage Industries**

Regarding the grounded position of daily activities in society, the relationship between people and their environment has been shaped for years to decades in one society. In this context, the craftspeople have long-term relationships with bamboo materials as Rosselin-Barielle (2017) in Mohan & Douny (2021) [5] termed as the process of "making," of one object or handicraft. In this scenario, while the craftspeople producing bamboo objects, the neuro-systems of the craftspeople's bodies and bamboo have a two-way connection through an act of processing the bamboo materials (See more on the subject-object materials of bamboo-producing activities in Rahardiani, 2022b) [6]. Human subjects have complex components within their bodies. By this means their bodily movements, driven by feeling and thinking, have honed skills that non-craftspeople may attempt when forming woven bamboo products for the first time. Over time, the enduring connection between the craftsperson's skin and bamboo, combined with their daily actions, influences the bodily techniques used to create bamboo objects over the years.

The influence of the design academics is observed among craftspeople at various scales, from individual families to larger craft communities or associations. Craftspeople could play the dynamics of power or "governmentalities" (Warnier, 2006: p. 188) [7] within the bamboo cottage industries through their act of processing bamboo material. In this sense, the subjects (craftspeople), objects (bamboo and the making tools), and the surroundings are constantly engaged with one another to shape a power in the bamboo crafts-making society. The actions of one individual impact not only other individuals but also the objects involved in crafting cultural objects/handicrafts.

#### **3.1 Governmentalities in the Industrialized Cottage Industries**

In the social, political, and economic spheres of society, the technologies of the large-scale dominant bamboo entrepreneurs appear to produce bamboo baskets and everyday functional objects. The more people work in the industrialized bamboo industry, the higher their status is because it is correlated with their amount of economic power in society. Each craftsperson in West Java who worked with the design academics leveled up their bamboo enterprises and gained great influence in their communities. As of right now, they concentrate on manufacturing those hybrid products in their workshops using all the most cutting-edge tools and materials in collaboration with the everyday utensil producers nearby. It means that smaller units of families or organizations have less



control over the bigger bamboo enterprises and are less able to access higher-level marketplaces. The process of shifting the non-machinery products made of bamboo into the mass-production system has neglected the meaning of producing bamboo utensils in traditional cottage industries.

The people's talents in producing bamboo crafts, which they had before the industrialization of crafts touched this hamlet, were lost as a result of the ignored core values along with their making habits, respecting the weaving activities. The fact that there are fewer high-skilled craftspeople creating such a variety of patterns now is a result of the paralyzed "sensori-affectivo-motori" (ibid. p. 187) [7]. The *sensori-motor* and physical actions of the crafters have also migrated to nowadays manufacturing those of the modified forms. Concerning the change in mastering the vanishing weaving skills, the local craftspeople in the industrialized bamboo cottage industries fear that they will soon lose the ability to use the traditional weaving methods (*mata itik*, *anyam dadu*, and *mata kebo*) from their hamlets. This proof demonstrates that those working in large-scale bamboo workshops in the hamlets are unable to use their "old weaving patterns," and instead concentrate on polishing the modified bamboo objects using advanced materials and modern framing techniques.

Within the realm of crafting, a craftsperson (as a holistic embodiment) employs their bodily actions, movements, gestures, senses, and emotional expressions as part of their crafting experience. This effort operates within a framework of authority, shaping the woven bamboo products that they create. The manifestation of power dynamics or "governmentalities" appeared at different levels within West Java's bamboo cottage industries, both preceding and following external development efforts in the hamlets. Among craftspeople, governmentalities impact each individual, ranging from family units to larger craft community associations. One's actions influence not only fellow individuals but also the objects that matter as main agencies in the hamlets to the activities of crafting cultural artifacts.

### 3.2 The Play of Power in Bamboo Producing Society

In our pursuit of comprehending an individual's positioning within a community, it becomes crucial to delve into Foucault's (1988) [8] concepts of technologies of the subject. This notion elucidates how an individual manages and directs themselves, treating their own self as a target of their actions and consequently being subjected to a form of control or governing known as "sovereignty" or subject-based "governmentality" (Warnier, 2009) [9]. In this context, the interplay between physical behavior in making and material culture serves as a framework to discern how a political entity (such as the academia) establishes a sphere of influence within craftspeople society. In another case, the political scene between the more skillful craftsperson to those craftspeople who are less skillful will be depicted.

Governmentalities signify the possession of power and are founded on the ability to influence both oneself and others (at community levels). The analogy of a political structure in the crafts-producing cottage industries, wherein individuals engage in exchanges of authority – whether it is within kinship systems, the management of physical space and resources, the resolution of conflicts, cooperation or collaborative

endeavors, and coercion (Warnier, 2021) [10]. It can be argued that political dynamics are consistently present in our everyday lives, manifesting through our communication and actions, both of which are inevitably shaped by our positioning within society and our expectations of how others perceive us. Those of us who occupy what Warnier and Mohan (2017) [11] refer to as "subject" positions willingly subject ourselves to societal power dynamics, which is the core of what is termed "governmentality" as previously discussed. In this specific context, within the realm of craft production, a craftsperson (as one embodiment) exerts their energy while functioning under the framework of "sovereignty" through their bodily behavior, movements, gestures, sensory experiences, and the emotional expressions conveyed through their body. This encompasses a significant part of the sensory encounter of crafting, resulting in the woven bamboo crafts they bring as tangible outputs.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has explored the intricate relationship between West Java craftspeople and bamboo within the context of industrialized bamboo cottage industries. We have examined the enduring connections that have allowed these craftspeople to adapt and thrive in the face of modernization within the bamboo industry. Our findings emphasize the deep-rooted subjectivity of West Java craftspeople and their profound connection with bamboo, highlighting how this connection shapes their techniques and skills over time.

The shifting process during the modifying process of traditional crafts – what is termed as "subjectivities" – in one embodiment of a craftsperson affects their behaviors and memory in making crafts. Extending the power dynamics observed within the limited realm of the bamboo cottage industry to the more intricate systems beyond it leads us to delve into how material culture plays a role in shaping the power dynamics within the bamboo industry in West Java. The design initiatives aimed at enhancing the economic conditions of a particular region often carry the influence of prevalent urban perspectives, with individuals having an urban mindset and dedicating minimal effort to familiarize themselves with the cultural nuances of the specific project location.

The MaP perspective signifies that incorporation involves the craftsperson's assimilation of objects and bamboo material into their bodily framework (*sensori-affectivo-motori*). The process of incorporation occurs by permeating the craftsperson's bodily schema through their "openings" or skin, thereby influencing their thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and physical movements through the repetitive actions they engage in daily activities. These individuals interact not only with the raw materials but also with other relevant items in their crafting routines, such as various types of knives and machetes. It is important to note that these processes of incorporation for the craftspeople extend beyond the realm of crafting activities and encompass their day-to-day routines as well. On the other hand, (dis)incorporation refers to the cessation of the actions that were previously categorized as incorporation, marking a shift in dynamic movements. The ongoing cycle of verbal and practical interactions in the realm of incorporation-(dis) incorporation, involving both subjects and the objects in their

surroundings (Mohan & Douny, 2021: 5) [5], contributes to the concept of “subjectification.” This concept emphasizes the incorporation of the bodily and material aspects in both the worlds of objects and subjects. When engaged in the creation of woven bamboo items, the hands of the craftspeople play a crucial role.

These bamboo-centric rural communities can be likened to institutions imparting weaving expertise, akin to schools focusing on the intricacies of weaving techniques. In the sense of the crafts development movement, the craftspeople should also communicate their needs as well as how they preserved the long-term behaviors and socio-cultural aspects in producing crafts in their area. In summary, this research sheds light on the adaptability of Mandalagiri, West Java craftspeople in the face of evolving bamboo handcrafting ecosystems. It calls for continued investigation into the dynamic relationship between humans, materials, and their environment in the realm of cottage industries, offering rich opportunities for future research and exploration.

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