

Nekara Pejeng: Heritage Representation of Pre-Balinese Literature Artworks

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This paper was compiled based on the results of a study to identify and understand the Nekara Pejeng artifact as a representation of the heritage of Balinese pre-literacy. The conducted study belongs to qualitative research with settings according to the condition of the subject. This research was carried out through a literature review approach and data studies through computer networks, such as social media and the internet, combined with field studies by visiting Penataran Sasih Temple where nekara is kept as cultural objects, which was also the research locus. Primary data was obtained through direct observation by visiting the object of research in addition to conducting interviews with a number of informants who had been determined before the research activity began. Secondary data were obtained through literature review in order to collect expert opinions that have been stated in books, accompanied by writings in various journals, results of seminars and workshops, as well as social media. The secondary data here were complementary to the primary data. This is due to studies in the research carried out being closer or more comprehensive. This study aimed to provide a clearer picture of Nekara Pejeng as a work of art from the Balinese pre-literacy era so that the method used was more descriptive qualitative. Because of its qualitative nature, the researcher is the main instrument, supported by interview guidelines in the form of a list of questions to guide the interview with informants such as Gedong Arca Bedaulu Gianyar Museum officers, Pejeng Village Heads, Village Prajuru (staff), temple administrators, community leaders who were purposively selected. This study proved that the moon of Pejeng is a bronze drum (nekara) stored in Penataran Sasih Temple which is believed by the Balinese to have supernatural powers and is used by the community in ceremonies asking for rain. The characteristics of Nekara Pejeng are in the form of a drum/drum made of bronze, there is a waist pattern in the middle, equipped with two sides of the punch field, and one of the fields is open. The moon of Pejeng is the largest nekara discovery in Asia which can represent the advancement of technology and art in the Balinese pre-literacy era. The decoration on the nekara contains magical religious meanings, namely local wisdom in the form of beautiful works of art with high aesthetics as evidence of the creativity of Balinese people in art which began in the pre-literacy period, continues to grow, develop, and have dynamics to this day.

Keywords: Nekara, representation, technology, and aesthetics

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Nekara Pejeng: Representasi Peninggalan Karya Seni Zaman Praaksara Bali

Tulisan ini disusun berdasarkan hasil kajian untuk mengetahui dan memahami artefak nekara Pejeng sebagai representasi peninggalan karya seni zaman praaksara Bali. Penelitian yang dilakukan adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan setting sesuai kondisi subjek. Penelitian ini dirancang menggunakan pendekatan kajian literatur dan studi data melalui jaringan komputer, seperti sosial media dan internet, dipadukan studi lapangan dengan mengunjungi Pura Penataran Sasih tempat disimpannya nekara sebagai benda budaya, yang sekaligus menjadi lokus penelitian. Data primer diperoleh melalui pengamatan langsung dengan mengunjungi objek penelitian di samping melakukan wawancara dengan sejumlah informan yang telah ditentukan sebelum aktivitas penelitian dimulai. Data sekunder didapat melalui kajian kepustakaan guna menghimpun pendapat pakar yang telah dituangkan dalam buku-buku, dengan dilengkapi tulisan di berbagai jurnal, hasil seminar dan lokakarya, serta media sosial. Data sekunder disini sifatnya melengkapi data primer. Langkah ini dimaksudkan agar kajian dalam penelitian yang dilakukan lebih mendekati atau lebih komprehensif. Penelitian ini bertujuan memberikan gambaran lebih jelas tentang Nekara Pejeng sebagai hasil karya seni zaman praaksara Bali, sehingga metode yang digunakan lebih bersifat deskriptif kualitatif. Oleh karena sifatnya kualitatif, maka peneliti merupakan instrumen utama, ditunjang pedoman wawancara berupa daftar pertanyaan untuk memandu jalannya wawancara dengan informan seperti: petugas Museum Gedong Arca Bedaulu Gianyar, Kepala Desa Pejeng, Prajuru Desa, Pemangku pura, tokoh masyarakat

yang terseleksi secara purvosif. Kajian yang dilakukan membuktikan: Bahwa bulan Pejeng merupakan sebuah genderang (nekara) perunggu tersimpan di Pura Penataran Sasih yang dipercayai orang Bali memiliki kekuatan supernatural, dan dipergunakan oleh masyarakat dalam upacara memohon hujan. Karakteristik Nekara Pejeng berwujud menyerupai kendang/bedug terbuat dari perunggu, terdapat pola pinggang di bagian tengah, dilengkapi dua sisi bidang pukul, dan salah satu bidangnya terbuka. Bulan Pejeng merupakan temuan nekara terbesar di Asia yang dapat merepresentasikan kemajuan teknologi dan seni pada zaman praaksara Bali. Hiasan pada nekara mengandung makna religius magis adalah kearifan lokal yang berwujud karya seni indah berestetika tinggi sebagai bukti kreativitas manusia Bali dalam berkesenian yang telah dimulai pada masa praaksara, terus tumbuh, berkembang, dan berdinamika hingga dewasa ini.

Kata kunci: nekara, representasi, teknologi, dan estetika

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INTRODUCTION

The basis of cultural unity actually existed long before the entry of Hindu and Buddhist influences in the archipelago, even though at that time there were already local variations. Studies of archaeologists, especially prehistoric research have proven the existence of this unity. Especially with the remains of material culture in the form of inscription objects, such as the remains of megalithic buildings scattered in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia. Another study, an anthropological study that focuses on examining people who still continue the megalithic tradition and connects it with ancestor worship and genealogy, fertility and prosperity rites, sacrifices of various types of animals for the salvation of spirits in the afterlife.

Based on historical facts that the development of Indonesian cultural arts has existed for a long time, starting from the pre-literacy era, classical times, the entry of Islamic culture, to contemporary times. In the prehistoric era, more works of art were found in the form of paintings, megalithic buildings, sculptures, various ornaments and craft arts. The development of art in the prehistoric era can be seen through two periods, namely the stone age and the metal age. This is evidence that the development of art and culture in the archipelago has been going on since prehistoric times. Along with the development of civilization and human knowledge, the method of creating an object was initially based on functional human needs.

The wave of cultural influence from India with Hindu and Buddhist patterns, followed by the presence of Islamic culture, and then the arrival of the colonial nation with its Western culture, also influenced the distinctive colour patterns of various ethnic cultures that accepted and adapted them according to the creative abilities' local genius. Different penetration intensities cause variations in the diversity of ethnic cultures that exist today. However, the cultural figures that underlie this diversity can still be well known, such as in traditional ceremonies related to certain stages in human life (life cycle) which show the diversity between one community and another or between one island and another.

[Geriya \(2008\)](#) said that the history of the growth of Balinese culture since the beginning of its development gave rise to three patterns of tradition, namely a small tradition oriented to local culture, a large tradition oriented to a religious system and Hindu culture as the first religion to enter the archipelago, and a modern tradition that includes

elements -elements that have developed since the colonial era, the era of independence, until today's era of globalization. Small traditions show the dominant character of collectivism, large traditions show the dominant characteristics of religiosity and aesthetics. The meeting between local culture and classical era culture resulted in traditional Balinese culture with expressive cultural characteristics with the dominance of the values of religiosity, art, and social solidarity. While the modern tradition that came next showed the characteristics of a progressive culture.

The pre-literacy era which describes the beginning of Balinese life can be known through the remains of the past in the form of living equipment which is thought to have originated from the period of hunting, gathering, and gathering simple food to the *perunagian* era. Evidence of activity at that time is shown by the discovery of stone tools whose manufacture is still relatively rough and very simple. Equipment like this is suspected as a tool to meet their needs at that time. The supporting tools in question are: *perimbas* axes, hand axes, hand chisels, drawstrings, and so on. All the equipment found is still simple and rough in its cultivation. At this time, they lived nomadic and so dependent on the conditions of the surrounding natural environment.

In the long journey of human life, humans are often faced with various challenges, especially in meeting the demands of human life which every day tends to increase, vary, and become more complex. This is very reasonable, because if you look closely, the challenge is very important to motivate the potential that exists in humans. Because in humans there are at least two feelings, on the one hand humans always feel lacking, on the other hand they always want to get more than they should. With the increasing demands of life that must be met, humans must try to find and find solutions to be able to meet these demands. Against the conditions faced, with their excess ability to think patterns, they try to create something to meet these demands. This is what encourages the emergence of new innovations to overcome the problems faced, as experienced by supporters of pre-literate culture.

In adding insight, sharpening concepts, and theories, it is very important to observe several studies on nekara, in addition to avoiding repetition. In this regard, [Hanny Wijaya \(2013\)](#) in his study entitled Nekara: Cultural Heritage from the Bronze Age stated that the development of culture today cannot be separated from the development of culture that existed in the past. The Dongson culture that

developed in Vietnam had no small influence on the development of culture in Asia during the Bronze Age. One form of bronze remains from the Dongson culture is a relic in the form of the Dong Son Drum or better known as nekara in the territory of Indonesia. This drum-like nekara has various functions that are adapted to the customs and traditions of each region, such as a musical instrument used when calling rain, wedding ceremonies, funerals and so on.

A study by [Girang Swara Sukma \(2013\)](#) with the title *Nekara in Bali as a Local Product of the Archipelago*, explains that the nekara scattered in the Bali area are suspected to be the nekara produced in Bali. This statement is reinforced by the discovery of stone molds which are strongly suspected as molds used to make metal tools, including nekara. The printing press in question was found in the Manuaba area, Tegallalang District, Gianyar Regency. The Manuaba area is suspected to be a metal tool workshop site in Bali. In addition, the mold was found to have a decorative pattern for the face mask as a decorative pattern typical of nekara in Bali. This finding reinforces the notion that the nekara in Bali was indeed produced in this region.

The findings from the Study of Nyoman Rema and Hedwi Priatmoko (2016) that the eastern Indonesian region including Alor is a cultural laboratory in revealing the past culture in Indonesia. Various local traditions are still developing, such as ceremonies using *moko* (nekara) remains of the past, such as the *moko*, have noble cultural values that reflect local wisdom and help shape the identity of the Alor community. These past relics are now functioned and interpreted as unifying the Alor community so that these relics need to be preserved, socialized and made a more in-depth study so that future generations of Alor can understand, love, and preserve the nobility of their culture.

The study of [Ni Made Ary Wahyuni et al \(2017\)](#) stated that the Pejeng nekara is considered very sacred and worshiped by the people of Pejeng Village. The nekara is placed in a shrine called Ratu Sasih. People believe that this nekara is part of the moon that fell from the sky. This nekara in ancient times was thought to be used by the community in a ceremony asking for rain. The Nekara Pejeng in the Penataran Sasih temple can be used as a means of education, such as with regard to the dress code used when going to holy places, clean appearance, polite attitude and speech, and proper prayer procedures, which is a transformation of educational values.

[Sutaba's research \(2018\)](#) entitled "Moon Pejeng" Representation of Technology and Prehistoric Balinese Artwork states that given the similarities in forms and certain decorative patterns between Indonesian bronze nekaras and Southeast Asian bronze nekaras, it can be assumed that Indonesia was influenced by the Dongson culture which is seen as a bronze technology center in Southeast Asia. It was further explained that Nekara Pejeng is a cultural work of prehistoric Balinese society which is multidimensional in nature, the same as other cultural works containing messages and information about life in the past. Based on this, the Pejeng nekara can be seen as a form of representation of technology, metal casting and artwork of prehistoric Balinese people which were not only significant at that time, but had succeeded in reaching their peak, thus becoming a masterpiece or highlight of the *perunagian* period in Bali.

Different from the studies that have been done, this research emphasizes that the artistic creativity created at that time did not only function as aesthetic-decorative. Nekara as a cultural artifact with high aesthetics can be used as a medium to connect the past, present, and future. Humans begin to recognize systems of living equipment/technology and supernatural things outside of themselves which they believe to have supernatural powers beyond their capabilities ([Koentjaraningrat, 1981](#)). After the introduction of metal, the various dimensions of his life began to change. Armed with the wisdom possessed, there was a considerable technological change. In dealing with life, they use equipment with very limited functions, after they know the technique of smelting and casting metal (metallurgy), they begin to make living tools from metal, but the previous tools are still used. Meanwhile, the problem in this regard is whether the bronze-type metal equipment they have succeeded in creating is only a tool to fulfil their daily needs. Are there no other purposes behind the creation of tools from bronze metal such as nekara. On that basis, Nekara Pejeng which is the result of the creativity of Balinese pre-literate arts and culture is very interesting to study.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was designed using a literature review approach and data studies through computer networks, such as social media and the internet. In addition, researchers also conducted research in the field by visiting the Penataran Sasih temple as the place where Nekara Pejeng is stored, which is also

the locus of research. Data collection techniques were carried out through literature studies obtained through various kinds of literature that were in line with the theme being studied in the research conducted.

This research is classified as qualitative research, which naturally corresponds to the original condition of the research subject. In this study, the data sourced from primary data obtained through direct observation by visiting the object of research and also conducting interviews with a number of informants who had been determined before the research activity was carried out. Secondary data is carried out through literature review in order to obtain the opinions of archaeological experts which have been stated in books, articles in various journals, results of seminars and workshops, as well as sources from social media. The secondary data here is complementary to the primary data. This step is intended so that the studies in the research carried out are closer or more comprehensive. The research steps to obtain the data needed are through the stages of observation, interviews with informants, documentation, and triangulation techniques ([Sugiyono, 2015](#)). Through field observations, it is expected to obtain data about the condition of the object, the belief system of the community around the research location, and the function of the nekara. As the main instrument in this research, namely the researcher himself, supported by supporting instruments such as interview guidelines in the form of a list of questions to guide the interview, and documentation.

Observation activities are followed by recording, documentation, followed by checking recek steps, and data cross-checking, the aim is to ensure the truth of the secondary data that has been previously collected regarding the nekara-shaped cultural objects. Interviews were guided by a list of questions which in practice in the field were developed according to data needs. In this case, a number of informants were determined, namely: Gedong Arca Bedulu Gianyar Museum officers, Village Heads, Village Prajuru, temple administrators, community leaders who were selected purposively. After the required data is collected, data analysis is continued in order to obtain answers that will be concluded. Data analysis here is essentially carried out simultaneously with the stages of data collection. When data collection has ended, conclusions are drawn, and data verification is carried out based on the results of data reduction and presentation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

[Baker \(2006:9\)](#) explicitly states that the study of culture is actually the practice of interpreting representations. The statement actually confirms that the representation and meaning of culture in the form of culture can only be understood in relation to the social community of the people concerned. Furthermore, [Piliang \(2006:24\)](#) views that representation is the act of presenting or presenting something through something other than itself, usually in the form of a sign or symbol. The symbol in this connection represents something outside of itself. Departing from this perspective, the pattern of the relationship between symbols or signs and social reality is a reference, where a sign refers to a represented reality. In a broader sense, real representation is representation. In its presence as a representative of something else, therefore representation is no different from symbols, signs, and symbols.

In Blumer's view, the term symbolic interactionism refers to the distinctive nature of human interactions. The location of the peculiarity is that humans interpret each other and define each other's actions, not just reactions. A person's response is not made directly to the actions of others, but is based on the meaning given to the actions of others. Interactions between individuals are mediated by the use of symbols, interpretations or by mutual understanding of the intent of each other's actions. It is further emphasized that the theory of Symbolic Interactionism is built on three basic assumptions, namely: 1) Humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these objects have for them; 2) The meanings are the result of social interaction in human society; 3) The meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process used by each individual in his involvement with the signs he encounters ([Poloma, 2008](#)).

In every culture that lives in the community, it always contains elements of knowledge, technology, and art. These elements are used by humans as control mechanisms to know, understand, and explain the environment around their lives. In addition, it is also used as a means to exploit, change, and utilize it to meet the needs of life. The usefulness of science and technology for human life is highly dependent on the underlying values, morals, norms, and laws ([Tumanggor et al., 2014:155](#)).

The development of living equipment/technology and art as part of the culture in the country is estimated to have been going on since the pre-literacy era. This development is thought to have almost coincided with the dynamics of civilization and the development of human thinking abilities. The method of creating an object was initially thought to rely on human functional needs, based on the stages of growth and development of civilization, such as: the old stone age, middle stone, new stone, and then entering the end of the stone age, commonly known as the megalithic age).

After the stone tools, the movement of human civilization has experienced a dynamic and has experienced a fairly rapid leap and has finally entered a new phase, namely the bronze age. In this era the level of civilization is indicated by the human ability to process metal. Like the skill of casting bronze metal into various living equipment products for their functional life or for the benefit of the spiritual world. With the skill of processing bronze metal, he succeeded in making various equipment to fulfil his life needs.

The various progress that has been achieved cannot be separated from the influence of outside cultures that contribute to each other in giving colour, blending and mixing with local cultures that are spread across the archipelago, including Bali. The influence of such a large external culture on the works of ancestral heritage in the Bronze Age is the culture of Vietnam which is commonly known as the Dongson culture ([Ardika, 2004:5](#)). Dong Son by archaeological experts indicated as the first metal culture research centre in the Song Hong valley, Vietnam. The results of this study explain that Dongson is the centre of bronze age culture in the Southeast Asian region. In the archipelago, the Dong Son culture was present and had an influence from the beginning of the Mesolithic Age to the Megalithic Age, and the greatest influence occurred in the Bronze Age ([Soekmono, 1981: 69-71](#)).

The Deutro Malays (Young Malays) are believed to be supporters of the Dong Son culture and this nation is thought to have spread culture throughout Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, through the West, starting from Vietnam to Malaysia, and finally to the archipelago. Dong Son's cultural influences in the archipelago include the religious system, technology and living equipment, knowledge systems, economic systems, and arts. However, the most powerful influence on the culture of the archipelago is the technique or method of processing bronze metal. Various artifacts that are patterned works of art from the bronze age, such as statues,

vessels, jewellery trinkets, including various kinds of nekara.

From the variety and number of tools made using metal materials that have been found, it turns out that more tools are made of bronze. One of the bronze metal tools, such as the nekara, was usually used as a basis for marking or measuring progress in the fields of science, technology, and art during the *perunagian* period. This is based on the pattern of distribution of this cultural artifact which is so wide, in almost all regions of Southeast Asian countries. The realization of this kind of equipment is because its supporters are thought to already have relatively high ideas, ideas, and creativity.

Nekara is an archaeological remains from the metal age (bronze age). Nekara has the form of a trunk made of bronze, resembling a waist in the middle, and at the top it is closed like a cormorant in a prone position. Relics of cultural objects in the form of nekars were found scattered throughout the country, such as: Sumatra, Java, Sumbawa, Selayar, Kei Islands, Rote, and Bali. However, the nekara found in Rote are smaller and slimmer than those found in other areas. Nekara like this in Alor is called *moko*. *Moko* for the people of Alor is still very functional, which is functioned in various ways, for example as a means of ceremonies, symbols of social status, and as a means of marriage or *belis*. multifunction *moko* is also proven through death ceremonies, changing of tribal leaders, and post-harvest ceremonies as well as welcoming the planting season ([Beri Ledang, 2020](#)). Based on the decorations, *moko* it is suspected that not all of the Among the decorations, some are thought to have come from the era of the Majapahit kingdom, and at the same time it can be used as evidence that the influence of Majapahit's power has covered the Alor archipelago.

In Bali, there is a nekara which is by far the largest in the archipelago and is relatively intact, measuring in height: 186.5m with a diameter of 1.60m, slender in shape, resembling a drum resembling a drum, there is a waist in the middle, consisting of two side of the hitting field, one is closed and the other is open ([Soekmono, 1981:65](#)). By prehistoric experts, this kind of cultural artifact is also known as a nekara with a head, because it wears four pairs of ornaments on the head or face mask with prominent round eyes, an elongated nose resembling a cone and long ears complete with ornate earrings from currency ([Sutaba, 1980](#)). Nekara Pejeng is highly respected, has high magical and spiritual religious values, is purified and sacred and is worshiped by the local people. It has decorative images, such as straight and crooked

lines, twists and turns, geometric images and animal patterns, such as bird feathers, star patterns, tumpal patterns and a pair of masks.

Of the many decorative patterns on the nekara, what is considered the most interesting here is the facial mask which is thought to not only function as a decorative art, but is thought to symbolize things that are religious, magical and spiritual, namely as symbols of ancestors who have powers beyond human capabilities and believed to be able to provide salvation to the spirits of people who have died in the story of his struggle to the realm of immortality. In addition, it is also believed to be able to provide protection and even welfare for the families left behind and the surrounding community (Sutaba, 2018). Another decoration that is thought to contain symbolic meanings of religious magic and spirituality is the decoration of peacock feathers. The peacock feather decoration is believed by the community to be a symbol of people who have died

and also as a guide from spirits to the realm of eternity, while animal decorations are believed to be a symbol of natural reality (macrocosmos), and *tumpal* decorations are thought to be a symbol of life (microcosmos).

The decorative pattern on the nekara, in addition to having magical and spiritual powers, also shows an artistic creativity that is so beautiful, and at the same time as evidence that supporters of the culture of that era had high artistic creativity. The decorations contain very important informative meanings in the development of Indonesian cultural history. This is a testament to the attainment of a high level of technology and aesthetic value in the prehistoric era, especially the Balinese bronze era. Based on the decorative pattern or painting on the nekara, it can be interpreted about the culture and life of the supporting community, especially from an era that has not left evidence in the form of writing.



Figure 1. Nekara Pejeng/Moon Pejeng at Penataran Sasih Temple: purified, sacred, and worshiped by the community (Source: author, 2021)

The decorations contained in the nekara can be used as a medium to inform or connect between the past and the present of mankind, especially in relation to the triadic concept (human-God, human-human, and human-nature). The same thing was expressed by Widyaevan (2019:159) that metaphysically Hindu-Balinese, that everything is often associated with cosmology. That every religious ritual held by the Hindu community in Bali uses art intermediaries. On that basis, the art media contained in nekara is assumed to function as a mediator to create, maintain, and maintain a harmonious relationship between human-God, human-human, and human-nature environment as the highest achievement of a work of art.

With regard to Nekara Pejeng, there are several myths that are still alive and are believed by the public. For example, local people believed that this nekara was a celestial object that fell from the sky and emitted light continuously, as a result, people at

that time had difficulty distinguishing between day and night. A bright situation like this makes it very difficult for the community, especially for those who have evil intentions, such as committing theft, in the end, to smooth out their evil intentions, the celestial body is urinated. As a result, the celestial body no longer emits light until today. Based on this incident, Pejeng nekara is also known as Pejeng month, as well as the name of the temple where the nekara is kept and purified, namely Penataran Sasih Temple (moon). In another version of the myth, people believe that the Nekara Pejeng is part of the *Kebo Iwa* in the form of an *earring*. *Kebo Iwa* is believed to be a legendary and very famous magical figure in this area, it is said that with his magic he succeeded in building the Goa Gajah site and the Gunung Kawi temple complex which became the pride of the Balinese people.

The discovery of the Pejeng nekara as a historical artifact with such a large size is becoming

increasingly interesting for archaeological researchers and researchers, especially for archaeologists to observe. Based on the results of the study of the Indonesian Antiquities Service. In 1932, three fragments were found stone prints in the village of Kenderan Tegallalang, Gianyar, wearing a face mask decoration that almost resembles a Pejeng nekara face mask decoration, but the size is not the same. A few years later, through research conducted by R. Soejono, again found two fragments of stone molds which were part of Cruq's findings in the same place in the village of Kenderan Tegallalang, Gianyar. The five stone molds are currently stored in the Puseh Temple in Manuaba Village. This stone mold is so respected and sacred as a means of worship that is so sacred by the local community. Similar findings for printing nekara were also found in the village of Pacung (Buleleng). From this evidence, researchers of archaeological objects assume that in the bronze era the Balinese preliterate community had mastered the art of metal casting and proved to be able to be creative in the local Balinese metal industry, which could produce arts crafts with bronze materials, such as nekara Pejeng ([Sutaba, 2018](#)). This kind of skill in metal processing continues to this day in several villages in Bali, for example making silver handicrafts in Celuk Sukawati Village, Gianyar.

Based on the archaeological facts that have been collected, in fact [Sutaba \(1981\)](#) is of the view that the Pejeng nekara is a genuine Balinese product, arguing that Balinese local wisdom at that time had begun to grow and experienced such a rapid will, which proved capable of producing very high Balinese artistic works. aesthetic value. In line with that, [Gede \(2002\)](#) also argues that Nekara Pejeng is a local product of Bali. Likewise, based on the results of an interview with I Wayan Muliarsa (former Head of the Gedong Arca Bedulu Museum in Gianyar) also has the same opinion. Nekara Pejeng is one proof of the success of the people who supported the culture of that era in Bali in processing metal. The reason that is used as the basis for the argument is that the discovery of molds made of stone which is seen as a mold for casting metal (metallurgy) to make nekara was found in Kenderan Village, Tegallalang District, Gianyar. The site where the mold was found is thought to have been a place to manufacture tools made of bronze-type metal. This fact is reinforced by the discovery of 5 pieces of stone mold fragments. Nekara scattered in this area are native Balinese nekara, which are categorized as Pejeng type nekara. Nekara as a cultural artifact of this kind can still be found in several areas in Bali.

The decoration on the nekara contains magical religious meanings, namely local wisdom in the form of high-value works of art as evidence of creativity in the aesthetic field from the Balinese bronze era period. The values of wisdom as local advantages contained in these cultural artifacts occupy a strategic position for the development of cultural history, science, technology, and art at the levels of social life. Through these cultural artifacts, we can understand the description of the levels of achievement in various aspects of human life, for example in terms of belief systems, economic systems, including the art system. Through these cultural artifacts, it can be known about the human ability to support this culture when making contact with other cultures, including in adapting and adopting the influence of that culture. In addition, the information obtained was dug up, for example regarding how the ancestors at that time used and maintained the sustainability of the natural surroundings. Information like this becomes very important to know in order to be used as a comparison, especially in utilizing available natural resources.

Nekara Pejeng occupies a strategic position as a source of information in people's lives, especially Balinese people in the past until today. Nekara Pejeng in the past was thought to have had multiple functions in people's lives, such as: as a medium in ceremonies to bring rain, especially in the dry season; seen as a symbol of the ancestors; as a war drum; and as a protector of society, because these objects are believed to contain supernatural powers.

The bronze era period was the peak of the use of bronze to make living tools, marked by the emergence of various kinds of nekaras that have distinctive shapes with high aesthetics. Therefore, an aesthetic perspective is needed to examine the beauty contained in this cultural heritage which cannot be separated from the elements of artistic creativity. Cultural heritage with an artistic dimension can be sure to hold many meanings that must be explored, researched, and studied in order to be understood and interpreted. Likewise with nekara which requires aesthetic analysis to reveal the meaning contained in the historical artifact. Art in nekara is actually an artistic expression as a form of human appreciation of divine power ([Duija, 2019](#)).

[Sumardjo \(2000:111\)](#) clearly and emphatically says that art is not a material but a value that can be seen by the naked eye as art connoisseurs. The hidden value behind the material is none other than the embodiment of the value intended by the creator of

the art. Art cannot emerge from art material, if the material does not contain and radiate artistic value. An artistic creativity is actually a symbolic process in interpreting a reality as a form of human devotion ([Seramasara, 2019](#)). This opinion actually emphasizes that the value of art is a form of abstract human devotion that can be enjoyed by those who understand and understand art.

The hidden meaning behind the nekara as an artifact left by the pre-literate era is woven together with a series of signs that can be interpreted like a text and in the text itself always contains meaning ([Bertens, 1996](#)). The meaning in a series of signs as a text is actually semiotics, namely the process of creating creative signs including codes that cannot be limited. In the view of semiotics, it is clearly and straightforwardly stated that the object and the text always indicate a symbol, and the symbol contains various hidden meanings behind the cultural object. In trying to create something, humans always form meaning. Nekara is a cultural heritage that represents the creativity of pre-literate humans. As a result of human creativity, nekara has various symbolic meanings, which can be understood according to the conditions and perspectives of the people who support these cultural objects. Nekara as an artifact left by the past can be used as a liaison between the previous generation and the next generation in establishing communication through information that can be presented by the remains ([Ardika, 2007](#)).

[Koentjaraningrat \(2008\)](#) identified three forms of culture, namely 1) cultural systems or ideas; 2) patterned social systems or actions; and 3) physical systems or cultural material objects. In this connection, form is related to the material infrastructure and system of physical culture; functions with social structures and social systems; and meaning with ideological superstructures and cultural systems. In this regard, culture is polarized into several components, namely cognitive, normative, and material.

By following [Papanek's \(1973\)](#) way of thinking, form is followed by function (*form follows function*), it is evident in the practice of life that is lived without realizing that this opinion has been put into practice on objects of use or objects of function. On this basis, it is clear that function follows form. But it should be realized, on the basis of what motivation these cultural objects were created at that time. Is it limited so that the object is functional or because there is a purpose of beauty to be conveyed. On that basis, it is very clear that the artistic aspect at that time could not be separated from its function. That

is, behind the creation of these functional cultural objects hidden symbolic meanings about life.

In fact, the basic nature of the value of an art is integrated and cannot be separated from human life. Almost all human activities contain elements of art. The fact is that in the history of cultural development always displays elements of art, as expressed in a variety of artistic activities. Artwork is actually a manifestation of the whole and the greatness of the human heart. Art is beauty that radiates from a subtle inner aspect, therefore art is active-creative-dynamic, as a force that can revive and enrich the minds of humans and society. In this context, art can be seen as the embodiment of the mind, intuition, the pre-reflective world of humans and the treasures of taste that are difficult to touch ([Tumanggor, 2014:166](#)).

CONCLUSION

Observing the studies that have been carried out, some conclusions can be stated as follows. First, that the influence of foreign culture (Vietnam) is quite large for the development of civilization in the region of Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, especially Bali, especially in the processing of bronze metal in creating living tools such as nekara. Second, Nekara Pejeng can be seen as a form of representation of metallurgical art technology (metallurgy) coloured with local wisdom with magical symbolic meanings that have grown in pre-literacy times, so that they become an important foundation in the further development of Balinese culture, especially in the arts. Third, the face mask decoration on the Pejeng nekara does not only serve aesthetic-decorative functions, but also functions as a magical symbol, which means protecting ancestral spirits to the realm of immortality. Fourth, Nekara Pejeng is a cultural heirloom that represents technological progress and works of art with high aesthetics during the Balinese pre-literacy era. Fifth, Nekara Pejeng in the past had a multifunctional dimension, one of which was as a means of ceremonial calling for rain to ensure the agricultural cycle to continue. Sixth, Nekara Pejeng is not merely a functional cultural object, but cultural artifacts are media that can connect and inform events in the past and present with future dimensions about various things in life.

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