

Art across the culture: context of hornbill figure



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Art Across the Culture: Context of Hornbill Figure As the making of hornbill images flourished during the 19th until the mid-20th century, there came a turning point when the Sultanate of Brunei handed over the political fate of Sarawak to James Brooke, a British colonist endowed with the governance of the region after his victorious assistance in vanquishing local rebels. With the unrestrained privileges as a white rajah, his dynasty of three generations ruled Sarawak for a hundred years under which the indigenous inhabitants were shielded from exploitation (Sarawak). Hence, it is within his era that the Iban people and other Dayak natives were entrusted to assume control of the militia for this ground which was why they could have received inspiration in enhancing military performance and creative rituals with the traditional regard for hornbill figure.

The Brooke regime, especially at the transition from the 19th century, sought favor on the commerce and trade with Chinese merchants in Sarawak. Chinese merchandise consisted of beeswax, birds' nests, camphor, dammar, and horns in exchange of guttuh and rattan (Wadley, 2006). Circulation of ecological articles through these products became prevalent that the trading economy further enriched the overall culture of Borneo, substantially affecting Sarawak people's way of life as determined by the increased craftsmanship of the Iban sculptors. Around this part of the latter 19th century as well, the Dutch were able to gain scheming advantage over the community market in the exportation of rubber, coffee, pepper, copra, coal, tin, and petroleum commodities (Rowthorn & Cohen, 2008).

At the time, the commerce made a shift towards acquiring Chinese labor for employment on mining and plantation fields in Borneo and gutta-percha, a tall tree-latex extract, entered the ethnic market as a new commodity

(Wadley). By this time, the Iban natives became more engaged in ranging forests than farming in search of gutta-percha which was intended to support the technology of expanding cable communication during the late 1860s since the latex material may be utilized for insulating cables of submarines (Wadley).

Consequently, the Iban communities from which the hornbill carvers came had the opportunity of learning the essence of migration and how they could benefit from gathering forest products. Though the Brooke administration felt it was more suitable for these people to focus and augment their potentials with agriculture, migrating to other places enabled the Iban people to seek improvement of living and mode of socialization as they agreed to interact with Chinese traders and other ethnic groups and converged on a mutual purpose.

In effect, the art piece critic understands the value of aesthetic work in the context of Iban sculpture that had been influenced by colonization and trade. The hornbill figure reflects ingenuity in the choice of colors and approach in carving based on how the aspects of culture in Sarawak were shaped in the age of White Rajahs. While the image preserves its religious worth, the social foreign dimensions are vivid and are representative of the amount of advanced skills the sculptor obtained in the period which greatly challenged ethnicity in this side of Borneo.

Works Cited

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