

Article

# Social Identities and Statue in Torajan Communities Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Since very few empirical endeavors have looked into statue and funerary art that represents social identities, this study aims to fill this gap. The research article aims to portray social status from the funeral arts, traditions and rituals. This longitudinal case study used interviews and a series of observations. The finding reveals that each funerary art represents particular class of noble families. Every funerary art also depicts specific insightful meaning for their noble families. The process of ritual and funeral ceremony is performed according to each status of noble families. This paper also describes the implication of the funerary art in social and cultural interactions.

**Keywords:** Funerary Art, Social Identities and Stratification, Torajan Communities, Indonesia.

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## 1. Introduction

The social stratification is studied from different perspectives. It can be viewed from educational attainments (Lessard-phillips and Li 2017), educational participations (Posselt and Grodsky 2017), social and democratic participation (Kern and Hooghe 2017), and religion and ritual participation (Shaver 2015), ethnic minorities (Lessard-phillips and Li 2017) and economic capital (Kraus, Park, and Tan 2017). The practices of social stratification exist in many avenues of human lives and still part of problems that occur in many part of the world. Due to this important problem, the theme of social stratification in other areas is thus worth to further investigated.

The issue of social stratification has been researched in many areas. For example, Marginson (2016) investigated social stratification from mobility perspectives. Marginson identified that larger social inequality set limits on what education can achieve. Countries with high mobility sustain a consensus about social equality, and value rigorous and autonomous systems of learning, assessment and selection in education. The other researchers indicated that the social status influences in the way Fijian and missionaries in rituals participation: church services and kava drinking ceremonies (Shaver 2015), and ritual dramatizations in German possess in their capacity to concentrate a large quantity of symbols that link emotions and prescriptions (Reygadas 2015). These studies indicate that social status influences the participations in rituals and religion practices. From these studies, it is

indicated that none of the studies of the social stratifications from rituals particularly in the funerary arts has been conducted within the Indonesian context. Therefore, very little information is found on the symbolic representation of social stratification in funerary art in Indonesian traditional noble communities.

The significance of the study is to contribute to extension of the understanding on the social stratification from funerary art perspectives. Thus, the following section depicts literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Concept of social stratification and funerary art

Social stratification is defined as “study the micro-foundation instances in which stratification is produced through everyday interaction and to examine how these situations form the basis for macro-stratification” (Kusow and Eno 2015, p. 410). In addition, (Kerbo 2017, p. 1) social stratification relates to “a system with rather predictable rules behind the ranking of individuals and groups, which theories of social stratification are meant to uncover and understand”. These definitions indicate that social stratification relates to the underpinning values that divide the living practice of communities into various levels.

Funerary art is “a person-made [art] objects as well as actions discernible at any particular funeral” (Kraus, Park, and Tan 2017, p. 103). The function of funerary art is to:

show respect and honour, provide a dwelling, place, use for services; be a means of pacification to prevent the soul of the dead from coming back, show the kind of life to be led after death, be a sign or symbol of religion, show the idea of rebirth; be a means of sustenance; assist in ‘resurrection’; protect from demons or dangers; ensure favourable verdict at the judgment of the dead, continue occupation such as hunting; save the living from the vengeance of the dead and see to the admission of the soul to the land of the dead (Kraus, Park, and Tan 2017, p. 103).

One form of funerary art is *Tau-Tau*. It is a form of statue or effigy that becomes a symbolic representation of a dead person based on social status. This *Tau-Tau* can only be seen in Torajan noble communities that live in South Sulawesi province in Indonesia. Culture of making *Tau-Tau* exists since ancestral traditions. The *Tau-Tau* not only the symbolic representation, but it has also ritual process and spiritual meanings. This tradition is passed down from one generation to another through the funerary art.

### 2.2. Previous research on social stratification, rituals and funerary art

Several important previous studies on social stratification, art, and the influence of rituals include religion, rituals and social stratification (Shaver 2015), religion and social inequality (Bulbulia et al. 2017), symbols and artifacts (Gagliardi

2017), how rituals are practiced (Bell 2009), and the value of Torajan sculpture (Suherman, Triyanto, and Sunarto 2017).

Bulbulia et al. (2017) investigated the Pacific cultures and social stratification. They identified that the practice of ritual killing illustrates aposematic signaling in human cultural evolution in two ways: “(1) killing honestly displayed the power of social elites to harm people; (2) ritual-mythological settings displace culpability for ritual killing from elites to the gods”(p.1). This research indicates that social class influences the culture and rituals of killing in Pacific regions.

Shaver (2015) studied the practice of social inequality in relation to their participation in rituals and religious practices in Fiji. Shaver concluded that the ritual and the religious practices are not equal to Fijian communities. The social status and hierarchy influences on the involvement to be preachers and leaders in the community. On the other hand, the younger, single and low level community tends to be in the periphery of the important events and roles. This suggests that social status and hierarchy influence the way they practice their rituals, religion and roles in a community.

Suherman et al. (2017) conducted a specific study on the characters value of sculpture of *Tau Tau* (effigies) in Torajan communities Indonesia. They identified seven values of *Tau-Tau* including respect, responsibility, wisdom, love and compassion, hardwork, integrity, and gratitude. They recommend that further research on the symbolic meaning and representation of *Tau-Tau* is important to further explored in order to provide comprehensive understanding of the indigenous Torajan communities.

Even though the reported studies above show positive and convincing evidence regarding the social stratification and rituals, there is still the need for examining the social stratification in another context. So far, no empirical endeavor has looked into social inequality represented by funerary art because it underpins the systems and values that lead and guide the practice of funeral occasion in noble families particularly in Torajan communities in Indonesia. To fill this gap, the present study attempts to continue the scholarship of social stratification from funerary art perspective.

### **3. Research method**

#### ***3.1 Research questions***

The present research was guided by the following research questions:

- a. What are the types of social stratification represented by funerary art in the noble Torajan communities?
- b. What are the meanings of funerary art for the noble Torajan communities?

#### ***3.2 Research design***

The case study research is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin 2009, p. 18). The current phenomenon of the case is the maintaining tradition of production of funerary art based on the social status of the noble families. The current phenomenon is also investigated according to the real-life context because it is study within natural setting of the communities. This longitudinal case study took places more than one year in Torajan communities.

### 3.3. Data collection and participants

Data collection for this study used semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentations of photos and effigies. The semi-structured interviews were conducted for approximately one hour for each participant. The participants for study were chosen purposively. There were nine participants: three participants in each level of nobility. The characteristics of the participants to be interviews:

- a. Three participants (pseudonym: *Daeng Na, Daeng Ja, and Daeng Uta*) from highest noble family: lives in the center of the town very senior family members, and head of *Tau-Tau* art making.
- b. Three participants (pseudonym: *Daeng Beca, Daeng Nga, and Daeng Nono*) from middle level of noble family: lives in the suburb, senior family members, and expert in the *Tau-Tau* making.
- c. Three participants (pseudonym: *Daeng Ra, Daeng Ni, and Daeng Ji*) from lower level of noble family: live in the highland, have experience in *Tau-Tau* making.

Observations were carried out in the three areas of the Torajan communities: centre of the town, suburb and the highland to witness the process of *Tau-Tau* production. Documentation includes pictures of *Tau-Tau* and pictures of funeral ritual celebrations.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data in this study was analysed using thematic approach. The thematic approach included several steps: a) all data gained in the field were coded based on the theme appeared from the data; b) the data were arranged and classified; c) all the data were categorized to determine major categories; and d) all data within major categories were tabulated using Ms Word to determine key categories. This process of thematic approach was also applied by other researchers (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2017; Abduh, Rosmaladewi, & Basri, 2018) within the Indonesian community settings.

## 4. Findings

Social stratification of noble Torajan family according to funerary art can be categorized into three levels: a) *Tau-Tau Batelepong* (Effigy of High Noble Family); b) *Tau-Tau Lampa* (Effigy of Middle Noble Family); and c) *Tau-Tau Nangka* (Effigy of Lower level of Noble Family).

### 4.1. Statue for highest noble family

*Tau Tau Nangka* reversed only for the highest noble family in Torajan communities. Based on the interviews from participants, this kind of effigy is made by the head of traditional art and culture or a specialist of *Tau-Tau*. The materials include wood from jackfruit and clothing from gold fabric. The height of effigy is between 1-1.2 meter and the width is approximately 50 cm. The process of *Tau Tau Nangka* production including all the materials above was created to form the effigy of the dead person.

The ritual funeral process of the dead person follows several procedures: first, the noble family held art performance that lasted from one week to one month. This art performance aims to respect the dead person and to be part of praying prior to burial process; second, the sacrifice of at least 24 buffaloes and pigs; third, the process of wrapping the corpse using gold fabrics; fourth, the mass eating with all guests and other community, and finally, the corpse is placed in the top of the hill or the peak of the mountain.

The meaning of this funeral ritual includes: a) to maintain the ancestral tradition that pass down from one generation to the others; b) to maintain the class of the society; c) to provide the food for guest and the poor people; c) to show the prosperity of the community and noble family; and d) to establish working together in the community particularly in the process of funerals.

#### **4.2. Statue for middle noble family**

*Tau Tau Lampa* reversed only for the middle level of noble family in Torajan communities. Based on the interviews from participants, this kind of effigy is made by middle level of noble family. This can be found mostly in the suburb of the town. . The materials of this effigy include mixed of any wood and casual fabric. The effigy is at least 1.5 meter in height and the width depends on the agreement of the family.

The ritual funeral process of the dead person follows several procedures: first, the noble family held art performance that lasted from three days to one week. This art performance is part of the ritual funeral process; second, the sacrifice of less than 24 buffaloes and pigs; third, the process of wrapping the corpse using casual fabrics; and finally, the corpse is placed in the *tongkonan* which is the traditional house of Torajan community.

The meaning of this funeral ritual includes: a) to maintain the ancestral tradition that pass down from one generation to the others; b) to maintain the middle class of the noble families; and c) to establish working together in the community particularly in the process of funerals.

#### **4.3. Statue for lower level of noble family**

*Tau Tau Batelepong* reversed only for the lowest noble family in Torajan communities. Based on the interviews from participants, the materials of this effigy consist of mixed of wood, without clothing materials. The effigy is at least 1.5 meter in height. The *Tau Tau Batelepong* is crafted by lowest level of noble family member

who was trained for the funerary art production. This type of effigy is mostly found in the highland or hill of the Torajan community.

The ritual funeral process of the dead person for this *Tau-Tau* follows several procedures: first, the noble family held art performance that take place between one to three days. This art performance is an integral part of the ritual funeral process; second, the sacrifice of only several buffaloes and pigs; third, the process of wrapping the corpse using casual fabrics; and finally, the corpse is placed in the cave of in the hole of the rock stone.

The meaning of this funeral ritual includes: a) to maintain the ancestral tradition that pass down from one generation to the others; b) to establish working together in the community particularly in the process of funeral; c) to be a sign that differs noble families from non-noble communities.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

From the findings, it appears that the polarized themes are described in Table 1 as follows:

Category	Features
Highest noble family	Basic features: gold fabric, Jackfruit wood Sacrifice: above 24 buffaloes and pigs Place of effigy: on top of hill or mountain Height of effigy: 1.2-1.5 meter
Middle noble family	Basic features: Casual fabric, mixed of any wood Sacrifice: less than 24 buffaloes and pigs Place of effigy: on traditional house Height of effigy: above 1.5 meter
Lowest noble family	Basic features: casual fabric, with no wood Sacrifice: few buffaloes and pigs Place of effigy: on top of the café or rockstone Height of effigy: above 1.5 meter

The findings of the study extend the understanding of the social stratification categories particularly from arts, rituals and beliefs. This finding has implications including a) special treatment from non-noble family; b) special spaces in Torajan Community Occasions; c) those from noble families are prioritized to be leaders both in public and private sectors; and d) the reciprocal contribution of the community during the process of funeral can be part of positive culture; e) the portraits of effigy reflects the current identities and images of contemporary Torajan communities.

Funeral art portrays three levels of nobility in Torajan Community: High, medium, and low nobility. The high nobility is portrayed by unique effigy with first class materials. The effigy not only exhibit rituals and spiritual values, but also it emanates the aesthetic values. For the aesthetic values, they are pivotal to conduct

within an in-depth investigation. The research is important to carry out within wider participants looking at non-noble communities' attitudes and responses towards the inherited tradition of noble families. It is also interesting to investigate the impact of *Tau-Tau* practice within decision making both in public and private institutions.

Further research is important to carry out particularly in relation to the philosophical and ideological meaning and representation of Torajan art and statue. The research will be very fundamental to bolster the current finding so that it can complement and provide comprehensive understanding of the statue and social identities. Research within multiple setting in different contexts is encouraged so that it can assist the understanding of social identities and statue from other social different contexts.

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