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BASIC IBAN DESIGNS

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INTRODUCTION

The love for design is universal. Everyone in the whole world has an interest in design, regardless of race, creed and reputation, rich or poor, all have a special interest in design. The degree of interest depends very much on the individual and it can be classified into two types: - (a) the direct interest and (b) the indirect interest. The direct interest can easily be heard from the comment of a person who appreciates the design he sees and the indirect interest cannot be heard but can be seen by a person's choice of things. He/She may never appreciate the design by word, but look at the things he/she has bought — a table for example — what is the shape of the table he/she has bought? Is it round, oval, square or triangular? Design is not only confined to something that is curved. Anything that has a shape, has a design in it. The shape of a leaf is a design, the vein inside that leaf is a design. The shape of a human being is a design. The way we comb our hair is a sort of design. The dress we wear is a design. The design I am talking about today is the type of design which is appreciated by a person with direct interest.

The Red Indians in the United States have their own design which comprises triangle, circle, oval, chevron, zigzag and so on. The arrangement of these produces a design which we may call the Red Indian Design.

The Maori in New Zealand are fond of making designs in their homes, community halls, boats, on carvings, on cloths and so on. They even decorate or tattoo their faces with designs. Most of the Maori designs comprise of lizards, whorls, and their traditional God, the Tiki.

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The Tarojas community in Indonesia is also fond of making designs which originate from the form of heads, join together to form a pattern.

The Indonesian and Malaysian Malays have their own unique form of design. Most of their designs are composed of stylized leaves and flowers:— The half-leaf, the complete leaf, the complete set of leaves, the half-bloomed flowers, the fully-bloomed flowers, the fruits and the tendrils. I must say that their standard in designing is very high indeed as can be seen in furnitures.

Now we come to the Dayak design (Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit, Bidayuh and Iban). In fact, the Dayak design has reached a high standard in its own style and uniqueness, *but* due to certain unintentional violation and mockery, the standard has been lowered. The violation of design is usually caused by the making of potteries just for the sake of money and the ignorant designers who take for granted that the Dayak design is something very simple to make.

Now let us focus our attention on Iban design. The Iban, one of the groups in the Dayak community has very rich designs. According to my simple research and observation, there are many types of Iban design. Each type of Iban design has its own specific usage and nature. We shall come to that later on.

ORIGIN OF IBAN DESIGN

Where does the knowledge of design come from? No one knows for sure. Legend said that the idea came from the celestial kingdom of Panggau Libau and Gelong. According to the legend, Panggau longhouse was full of designs:— On walls, posts, ceilings and *tangga*. Other things like *lesong*, *kisar alu*, *sengayoh*, etc. were all decorated with designs. Traditionally, Iban characters, way of living and artistic skills mostly originated from celestial people, namely: Keling, Laja, Ngelai, Tutong and so on. One of the legends from which the knowledge of designing originated was the dream of a man called Gemong. In his dream, Gemong was shown by the chief of a longhouse the various types of designs and when he woke up from that instructive dream, without hesitation he began to record down all that he had seen in the dream.

Another legend connected with design was about two men named Nyanggau and Jantau who encountered the spiritual people named Ruai and Bubut. After many months of their staying with Ruai and Bubut, they decided to tattoo their bodies since all of them were experts in designing and tattooing. When every things were ready, Ruai was the first to be tattooed by his friend, Bubut. Unfortunately, when it was Bubut's turn to be tattooed, Ruai, the designer carelessly splashed the whole body of poor Bubut with black and brown colours. Bubut was of course very angry and a quarrel began. They cursed each other and eventually their house disappeared while Ruai and Bubut changed into the 'ruai' bird and 'bubut' bird respectively. Upon returning home, Nyanggau and Jantau began to make some designs according to what they have observed from Ruai and Bubut.

There are some more legends which are connected with the origin of designs but most of them are quite difficult to believe. They may be true but one thing for sure is that the art of designing reflects the Iban's appreciation of beautiful things around them. The Iban's love for design can be demonstrated by their body tattoos. It is a pity that new generations of Iban seem to forget or neglect the value of their ancestral skills in design. A tree that does not grow will eventually die and of course the same thing will happen to the design. I must stress that the art of designing is something alive. It will die off if we the Iban neglect it, and it will grow and develop and will keep on developing depending on our standard of living. We, the Iban, should not restrict its development, its modification and its usage, otherwise the standard of Iban design would remain in a juvenile state as it