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A Preliminary Visual Comparison of Ceki and Ujang Omi: Two Traditional Indonesian Cards and their Predecessors

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Abstract. Historically, three kinds of game cards are known to be played in Indonesia: remi (the standard French deck), ceki, and ujang omi. Existing literature has established that the now niche ceki and ujang omi are descendants of Chinese and Portuguese cards, based on evidence such as game mechanics and terms. Discussion of their visual characteristics, however, is still limited. Through archival comparative analysis, this paper compiles relevant samples from existing publications and digital repositories, then qualitatively describes visual similarities and dissimilarities (particularly in the suit system and court figures) in exemplary decks. The overall suit systems of ceki and ujang omi still preserve many aspects of their ancestors, but their design underwent considerable stylizations and abstractions. The visuals of ceki, which have been homogenized, are characterized by strong geometric stylization of the Chinese prototype. The underlying suit and rank are obscured, due to the stylization and Sino-centric references which are not widely understood by Indonesian players. The visuals of ujang omi are based on looser standards. Naturalistic depictions in the prototype Portuguese deck are generally simplified. Suit symbols tend to become abstract, conflating shapes. Comparison to more variations of ujang omi is needed to make a more definitive evaluation. Thus, despite their now limited usage, the design of ceki and ujang omi still shows historic cosmopolitan influence woven into the everyday life of Indonesians.

Keywords: traditional playing cards, visual comparison, ceki, ujang omi, shuǐhǔ pái, dragon decks

Abstrak. Dalam sejarahnya, terdapat tiga jenis kartu permainan yang dimainkan di wilayah Indonesia: kartu remi, *ceki*, dan *ujang omi*. Diketahui dari pustaka eksisting bahwa *ceki* dan *ujang omi* (yang kini hanya dimainkan dalam lingkup terbatas) masing-masing adalah turunan kartu Tionghoa dan Portugis, berdasarkan bukti seperti mekanika dan istilah dalam permainan. Namun begitu pembahasan ciri rupa kartu-kartu ini cenderung masih terbatas. Melalui analisis komparatif kearsipan, tulisan ini mengkompilasikan contoh kartu relevan dari publikasi eksisting serta repositori digital, diikuti dengan deskripsi kualitatif perbedaan dan persamaan visual (terutama pada sistem simbol dan figur *court*) pada beberapa dek perwakilan. Sistem umum *ceki* dan *ujang omi* melestarikan banyak aspek kartu leluhur masing-masing, namun desain visual mereka mengalami stilisasi dan abstraksi yang cukup kentara. Visual *ceki*, yang telah terhomogenisasi, dicirikan dengan stilisasi geometris kuat dari purwarupa Tionghoa. Sistem simbol dan angka dibalik kartu *ceki* seringkali tersamarkan, akibat stilisasi dan rujukan Tionghoa-sentris yang tidak umum diketahui

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pemain Indonesia. Visual *ujang omi* memiliki standar yang lebih luwes. Penggambaran naturalistik di prototipe Portugis umum tersederhanakan. Simbol-simbolnya kerap berubah menjadi bentukan abstrak yang saling menyerupai. Namun begitu perbandingan dengan lebih banyak variasi *ujang omi* dibutuhkan untuk menghasilkan ulasan lebih pasti. Maka dari itu, terlepas dari daerah penggunaannya yang telah menyempit, desain *ceki* dan *ujang omi* masih menunjukkan pengaruh kosmopolitan historis yang terajut dalam kehidupan sehari-hari masyarakat Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: permainan kartu tradisional, komparasi visual, ceki, ujang omi, shuǐhǔ pái, dek naga

INTRODUCTION

The archipelago that is now part of Indonesia has long been a crossroad of trade and culture, creating diverse traditions which constantly react to changes while evolving new forms and meanings. This dynamic has been much discussed in studies that explore traditional Indonesian visual arts, ranging from architecture to textiles and puppet craft. Games are not usually discussed within this scope, which is a shame. Games are present in everyday life of all societies, and some that seem trivial today have surprisingly distant origins that reveal deep cosmopolitan connections embedded in everyday life. This can be analyzed not only by the gameplay itself, but by tools that are part of the game, such as boards, tokens, and cards, the latter of which is going to be the main subject of this paper.

It is remarkable to consider that games using card decks from three distinct branches of their complex evolutionary tree (as we shall see) are played in Indonesia, although not in equal measure of popularity. Like the rest of the world, the standard French deck is played across the archipelago and commonly known in Indonesian as *remi*, a term deriving from the game Rummy. As late as the 20th century this deck was mainly played by Europeans, while indigenous and Chinese peranakan communities preferred *ceki* decks. Otherwise known as *koa*, *ceki* is a descendent of the Chinese money suited deck introduced by Chinese migrants who had long traded with the archipelago. Reports compiled by Tjan Tjoe Siem [1] show that *ceki* decks were widely played and are attested in most major settlements such as Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Badung, Klungkung, Lombok, Banjarmasin, Manado, Ambon, and Timor. It is also known to be played in Singapore and Malaysia. Nowadays, *ceki* has become a niche but still retains considerable popularity in certain regions such as Minangkabau and Bali [2].

Figure 1. A card playing session in Java circa 1925. Note the visible *ceki* cards held by the leftmost player. The popularity of *ceki* in Java has since declined considerably. Source: KITLV (no. 183713)

The last type of card deck is perhaps the most shadowy. Played almost exclusively in the regions of south Sulawesi is a type of card deck called *ujang omi*.[1] The deck is mostly associated with the Makassar and Bugis people. Similar decks were once found in the

[1] In Bugis often prefixed into *ma'bujang omi* or *bujang omi*. An alternative Makassar term is *buyang pakarenang* [4, p. 317]

Torajan hinterlands,[2] but records of Torajan players are limited. No study has yet to identify indigenous records of this deck, and the earliest descriptive report is by Dutch scholar B. F. Matthes [3] who surmised that it descended from Portuguese cards. Later studies such as Kaudern [4, pp. 317–324], Itō [5], and Depaulis [6] agreed with this assessment, pointing to term similarities with the Iberian game of *hombre* (later known as *ombre*, after the French name) and the attested presence of Portuguese in 15-16th century south Sulawesi who could have introduced the cards. There are reports that *ujang omi* deck is still current in the hinterlands of Maros and Boné region,[3] but the extent of its use today is far from clear.

While the immediate ancestor of *ceki* and *ujang omi* is not in doubt, how different are they in terms of visuals? How many elements have been preserved and what innovations have been introduced? Answering such questions may serve as the "entrypoint into current and future discussions of art, games, and the shifting yet always significant relationships between humans, images, and things," to quote Mew Lingjun Jiang [7, pp. 81–82] in her study of Japanese *karuta* カルタ. Such discussion may also further reveal how migration, colonisation, and trade in the archipelago effects the everyday material culture of Indonesian societies. Unfortunately, playing cards in general are rarely treated as objects of academic interest, partly due to their ephemeral nature and perhaps perceived triviality. Papers on the subject are often relegated to magazines of collectors' societies or special-interest monographs. Further, within the topic of card games itself, information about regional Asian cards (let alone Indonesia's) tends to be sparse or inaccessible to wider, international audiences. Few studies which do mention these cards often focus on game rules, technical terms, and origins but rarely commenting on the visual designs of the cards while only providing few (and often poor) figures. It is hoped that through this preliminary analysis, readers can better imagine the visual characteristics of these two card decks and provide a foundation for later, more comprehensive studies.

METHOD

This paper is primarily an archival comparative analysis, as most of the evidence is derived from archival or artefactual sources. Many studies of traditional Indonesian arts have tried to uncover symbolic meanings behind visual aspects which have crystallized within an artefact, in the hopes that this can result in deeper understanding of the artefact or culture that produced it. But often, this attempt is fraught with uncritical interpretation,[4] resulting in highly subjective guesswork of 'meanings.' Breaking away from this usual pattern, it is not within the interest of the authors to uncover 'meaning' behind these cards. This paper attempts to provide description of visual features present in *ceki* and *ujang omi* and compare them to their antecedent decks based on qualitative observation.

The authors first compile attestations of relevant card decks (namely *shuǐhǔ pái*, *ceki*, dragon decks, and *ujang omi*) in published literature. This is then augmented with photographic documentation from the digital collections of several world museums. Data collection is done opportunistically by scouring relevant keywords, categories, and images.

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[2] Two of them (procured circa 1810) are preserved in the Yale University's Cary Collection of Playing Cards of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (sample #4a, 4b). A deck was also reported and reproduced in Grubauer [35], as mentioned by Depaulis [6, p. 38].

[3] A photo of the card being played in contemporary Maros is shown in Iwan and Adriany [36, pp. 168–169], although not much information is provided. The cards' presence in contemporary Boné is based on 2023 personal communication with Bu Norma Parenrengi from Carangki village, Maros, who still produce homemade *ujang omi* for players in neighbouring Boné region. Interestingly, the authors note that Bu Norma's basic card design is identical with the deck collected from Takalala, Soppeng in 1991, published in Umebayashi [37, p. 217] and now on display in 三池カルタ・歴史資料館 Miike Karuta History Museum. The authors thank Akhmad Taufiq and Mr. 梶原 Kajiwara from Miike Karuta History Museum for the information.

[4] See criticism in Barnes et al [38, pp. 4–5]. From personal experience, this often happen due to uncritical use of folk interpretation (even if they contradict facts) and the act of data cherry picking to justify pre-made conclusions, known in Indonesian as *cocoklogi* match-ology (see [39]).

Compiled documentations are then narrowed to those which fulfil several criteria: the deck must contain no less than half of the total cards, the obverse of each card must be clearly visible, the photograph must be in color, and they must be accessible online. Other decks which are not found in these online collections are represented in published literature, but they do not differ substantially from those which have been located as part of this search.

The compiled decks can be seen in table 1. From these, authors identify basic and recurring visual features in their graphic system which are then exemplified by one or two decks chosen from each type. The visual similarities and dissimilarities between chosen decks are then described qualitatively, especially regarding the suit symbols and court figures. *Shuǐhǔ pái* is compared with *ceki*, dragon decks with *ujang omi*.

Table 1. Documentation of some relevant card decks in public online repositories and published literature that the authors have compiled.

Type	Sample #	Institution	Collection #	Publication	Provenance
Shuǐhǔ pái	1a	British Museum	1896,0501.907.a-al	[8, pp. 184–185]	Guangdong, Qing Dynasty
	1b	Bibliothèque nationale de France	FRBNF40917692	-	China, 19th century
	1c	Wikimedia Commons	-	-	Tianjin, 21st century
Ceki	2a	-	-	[9, pp. 65–67]	Malaysia/Singapore, late 19th century
	2b	-	-	[10, pp. 300–301]	Indonesia, late 19th century
	2c	Bibliothèque nationale de France	FRBNF40917901	-	Singapore, 1870
	2d	Bibliothèque nationale de France	FRBNF40917899	-	Bangkok/Singapore, 1870
	2e	-	-	[11, p. plaat xvi]	Indonesia, early 20th century
	2f	-	-	[12, p. 46]	Java, early 20th century
	2g	-	-	[1, pp. 28–46]	Java, mid-20th century
	2h	Authors' collection	-	-	Bali, 21st century
Dragon decks	3a	Nationaal Museum van de Speelkaart	S01425	[13]	Antwerp, 1567
	3b	Archivo General de Indias	MP-MEXICO,73	[14, p. 68]	Mexico, 1583
	3c	Bibliothèque nationale de France	FRBNF40353798	-	Malta, 1693
Ujang omi	4a	Yale University Library	BEIN NEI1	-	Toraja, south Sulawesi, early 19th century
	4b	Yale University Library	BEIN NEI2	-	Toraja, south Sulawesi, early 19th century
	4c	Wereld Museum	RV-37-251	-	Southeast Sulawesi, mid-19th century
	4d	Wereld Museum	RV-804-256	-	Luwu, south Sulawesi, late 19th century
	4e	Wereld Museum	TM-668-201	-	South Sulawesi, early 20th century
	4f	Wereld Museum	TM-673-3	-	South Sulawesi, early 20th century
	4g	Världskulturmuseerna	1928.10.0040	[4, p. 320]	Maros, south Sulawesi, early 20th century
	4h	Wereld Museum	WM-15995	-	Pangkajene, south Sulawesi, early 20th century
	4i	Musée Français de la Carte à Jouer	-	[6, p. III]	Turnhout, 1929
	4j	Wereld Museum	TM-3754-5	-	South Sulawesi, mid-20th century

LITERATURE STUDY

There are countless card games in existence. Some games use proprietary decks, like Uno. Some decks can be used for multiple games, and perhaps the most widely used of this type is the so called “international” or “standard” 52-card deck. Among its features are four suits (hearts, diamonds, spades, clubs) each comprising ten cards numbered 1–10 (also known as pip cards, with 1s known as aces), three court cards (jack, queen, king), and finally optional joker cards. The visual design of this deck, while seemingly fixed and timeless, is only one young branch among several others in a complex evolutionary tree spanning centuries, cultures, and continents. Due to the limitations of this paper, the authors are only going to give a brief overview of their development.

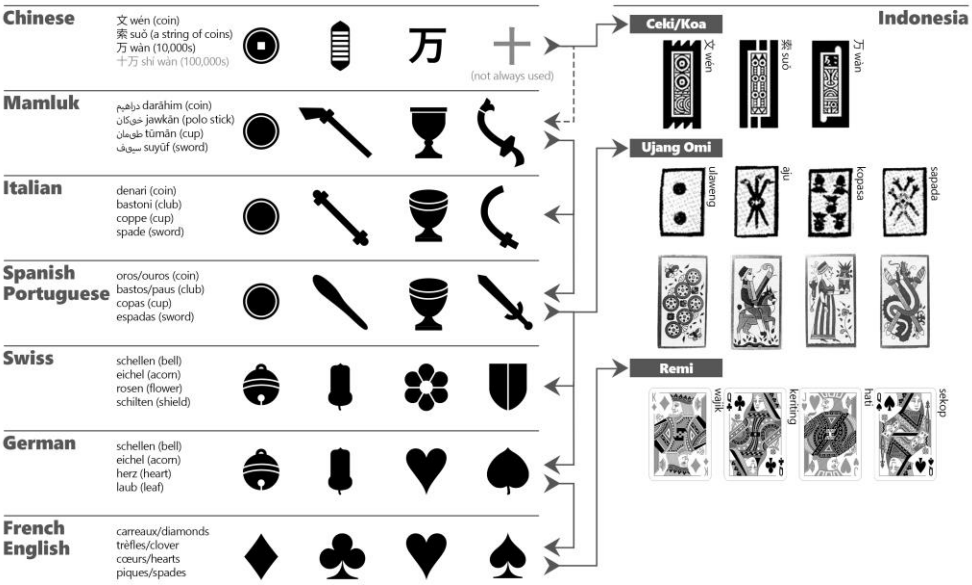

Figure 2. A diagram of suit evolution and card decks with corresponding suit system played in Indonesia. Source: authors

The earliest reference to card-like games comes from China. Chinese records note a “game of leaves” (Mandarin: *yèzi* 葉子)[5] played among Tang dynasty populace, but scholars such as Lo [15, p. 402] have argued that this was actually akin to a board game, where the word “leaves” refers to the pages of the rulebook. Less ambiguous reference to playing cards only began to appear in Yuan dynasty records [15, pp. 390, 403–404], which developed into several types of cards including dominoes (and domino cards), money-suited cards, and character cards. The most relevant to our discussion is the so-called “money-suited cards”,[6] consisting of ten pips in three suits derived from cash coins, strings of coins, and myriads of coins. Originally, a ten-myriad suit also existed [16, p. 36], [17], but the suit eventually fell out of favour and is only preserved in decks like the Hakkanese “six tigers” (Hakka: *luk fú* 六虎). The system of this card type has been identified by scholars as possible ancestor to the playing cards that appeared later in the West [16, p. 36], [18], [19, p. 12], [20, pp. 38–41], [21]. Likely carried through the Silk Road trade routes, the type spread first to Persia and then the Islamic world. This hypothesis is supported by several Mamluk-era Egyptian cards dated to the 12th to the 15th century, the most remarkable of which is a near-complete deck now kept in the Topkapı Palace, Turkey.

[5] Unless otherwise stated, all Chinese terms in this paper are romanized into Hànyǔ Pīnyīn based on Mandarin pronunciation. Note however that historically most Chinese and *peranakan* communities in Indonesia would have not spoken Mandarin but Southern Chinese varieties such as Hokkien and Teochew.

[6] The authors have not found an exact Chinese equivalence for the term. Using the term *mǎ diàopái* 馬吊牌 in Google would return similar decks, but the term originally refers to a game which can be played with the deck, not the deck itself.

This “Mamluk deck” already prefigures the basic features of a modern international deck of cards with four suits (coins, cups, swords, and polo-sticks), each with nine pips, an elaborate ace, and three court cards: king (*malik* ملك), deputy (*nā'ib malik* نائب ملك), and second deputy (*nā'ib thānī* نائب ثاني)[17], [22], [23]. Through the Mediterranean trade, playing cards were then brought to Europe. The earliest mention in European sources is from a 1371 Catalan rhyming dictionary where card games are known as *naip*, which was clearly borrowed from *nā'ib*. The *nā'ib* card may have had prominent role in the games played by the Muslims and came to be used to refer the game and later the whole deck when the term was borrowed into European languages [23, p. 113], [24, p. 14]. Cognates of this name are still found in Italian (*naibi*) and Spanish (*naipes*). Early fragments of European cards show that the basic structure of the Mamluk deck remained intact, but the visual design was quickly modified to the taste of its adopted culture. The polo sticks for example were transformed into clubs as polo was unknown to Europeans. The court cards, which are only indicated through captions in the Mamluk deck, are drawn with human figures in European decks [16, pp. 39–43], [19, pp. 13–18], [20, pp. 36, 40–41], [25, p. 10], [26], [27, p. 77].

Figure 3. 6 pip cards from various decks. From left to right: Chinese, Persian, Mamluk, Piedmontese, Swiss, French. Source: British Museum (no. 1896,0501.907.a-al), Bibliothèque National Francaise (no. NAF 20442 (2), 27-VI-3, FRBNF40918891, FRBNF40918496, FRBNF40918667), Wikimedia Commons (user Doremifaso).

Card-making rapidly became a growing industry in early 15th century Europe. Most surviving early cards are luxurious hand-painted decks; cheaper products for everyday use are well attested but must have disintegrated rapidly [20, p. 38]. Through the rise of printmaking technology, manufacturers were able to make diverse card variations to satisfy demands of novelty [20, pp. 29–31], [28, p. xv]. It was only at the end of the century that certain visual features began to stabilize into regional preferences. Mediterranean regions kept the Mamluk suit precedent of coins, cups, swords, and clubs (formerly polo-sticks). The court cards became kings, cavaliers (identifiable by their horses), and male or female jacks.[7] This is now known as the Latin suit system and would later split into the Spanish and Italian suits [16, p. 17].[8] Makers in German and Switzerland, for reasons that are not well understood, settled on a different suit system. In the court cards, the king card is kept, but his subordinates became over-knave (*obermann*) and under-knave (*untermann*). A queen card was once introduced as an equal to the king, but the card did not persist in the Swiss-German system.

The standard suits of the 52-card deck used today is traceable to 1480 France, hence it is also called the French suit system. The French suit symbols, apart from diamonds, are mostly a regularization of German suit symbols. Their simple, abstract shapes and single colors were possibly developed out of practical concerns to make mass production more efficient. This results in a rather impoverished appearance but more affordable price and higher profits for the card makers. It is partly for this reason that the French suit system came to be dominate card production as time passes [16, pp. 22–23], [20, pp. 40–43]. In

[7] The name ‘jack’ itself does not appear until the 17th century, in association with the game of All Fours. In English they were formerly known as ‘knaves’.

[8] In French and English-speaking world, these suits are more recognized as the suits of Tarot decks, used for esoteric purposes.

the court cards, again the king was kept. The cavalier of the Latin suits was replaced by the queen introduced in German/Switzerland. The jack was made all-male. Once the forms of the European card decks were settled, European colonialism then further dispersed them to various parts of the globe [20], [27].

DISCUSSION

Shuǐhǔ Pái and Ceki Decks

The ancestor of *ceki* is a specific type of money-suited deck called *shuǐhǔ pái* 水滸牌 or Water Margin cards, so called because of the *Water Margin* heroes featured in the myriad suit.[9] *Water Margin* is a Chinese novel recounting the fictional story of 108 outlaws that gathered in Mount Liáng (or Liángshān Marsh) to rebel against Northern Song authorities. It was written sometime in the 14th century during the Ming dynasty, at a time when novels in the vernacular language started to rise in popularity. The novel is now considered one of the masterpieces of Chinese fiction [29, pp. 2–3], with many of its characters becoming well-known figures in Chinese literature. It is unclear however why *Water Margin* heroes specifically came to be used for playing cards and known descriptions going back to the Ming dynasty can only offer speculation.[10] To illustrate the visual characteristics of this card type, the authors will use an example deck from contemporary Tiānjīn (sample #1c) which can be seen below:

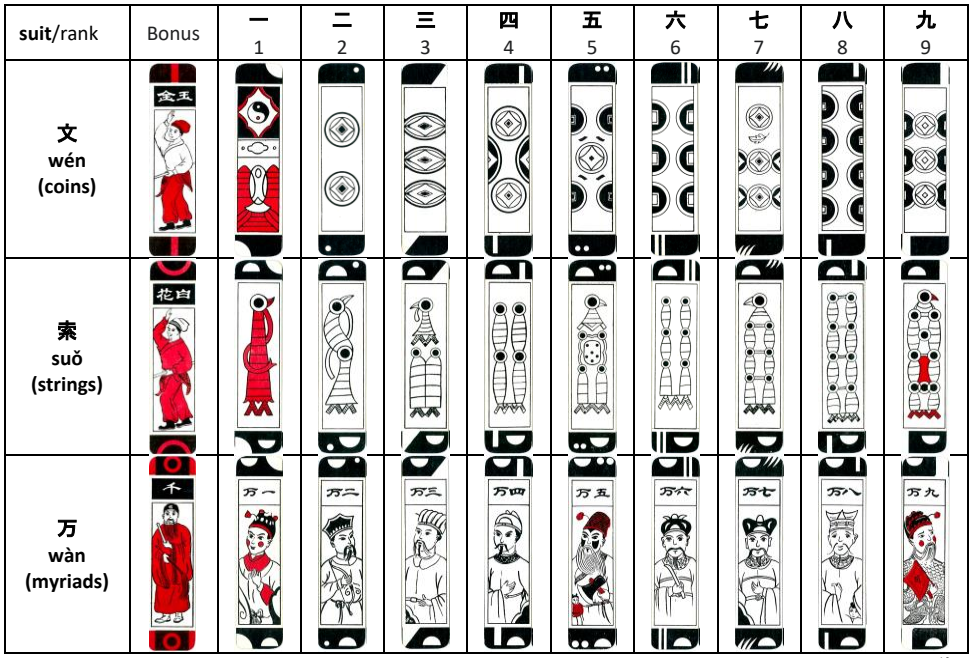

Figure 4. A contemporary shuǐhǔ pái deck from Tiānjīn (sample #1c), with one card labelled 道老 omitted. Source: Wikimedia Commons (user Outlookxp).

Prunner [30] categorizes Chinese playing card figures into three styles: naturalistic (least abstracted), linear, and geometric (most abstracted). The Tiānjīn example above would fall under the naturalistic category. The deck consists of 31 cards arranged in 3 suits: coins (*wén* 文),[11] strings (*suǒ* 索),[12] and myriads (*wàn* 万). Each suit consists of 1-9 pip cards and a bonus or "honour" card. The deck has one additional bonus card that does not appear to belong to any suit. The suit system is based on Chinese monetary units that also became part of the game of Mahjong. Coins are straightforward enough; they represent

[9] Note however that some versions of the deck have heroes in all of its cards, and some versions do not have heroes.

[10] For example, Lǐ Shìyù 李式玉 (1622-83) in *The Theory of Forty Cards* 四十張紙牌說

[11] Alternatively, *qián* 錢

[12] Alternatively, *chuàn* 串 or *diào* 吊

single cash coins with square holes. The string suit represents a bundle of coins strung and held in place with knots at their ends, graphically abstracted into segmented tubes with black circles at one end. The square hole in the middle of Chinese coins allows them to be bundled together in strings, and it is in this bundled form that coins were usually circulated throughout Chinese history.[13] In some decks the strings of coins fancifully become bamboo (as they are in Mahjong), or fish on strings. The myriad suit is not represented pictorially but through the character *wàn* 万, meaning "ten thousand,"[14] preceded by Chinese numerals one 一 to nine 九. To aid in the identification of suits and ranks, indices are added in the extremities of the cards, which gave another benefit to players by allowing cards to be held close together in a fan with one hand. The indices in the standard French deck consist of the numeric rank and suit symbol placed at two corners of each card. The indices of *shuǐhǔ pái* consist of geometric shapes formed by the negative space in the upper and lower black frames of each card. Let us use the 7 pip cards as an example. The rank of 7 is indicated through three diagonal slashes present in all three suits. Upward facing semi-circle indicates the myriad suit, downward facing semi-circle indicates the string suit, while the coin suit only has rank indices.

As previously mentioned, a prominent feature of this card type is the *Water Margin* characters featured in the myriad suits. For unknown reasons, it seems that specific characters are almost always used for certain ranks. Their identity is sometimes made clear by a caption, but more often this must be inferred by certain attributes of the figures.[15] In the example above, the character Zhū Tóng 朱仝 in the 8 of myriads is identifiable by an accompanying child (figure 6). Zhū Tóng is often illustrated along with this child as it became an important plot device for Zhū's involvement into the rebel group around which the novel revolves. As the story goes, Zhū was working as an assistant to a local prefect in Cāngzhōu whose four-year-old son was fond of playing with him. One day, Zhū was approached by the rebel Léi Héng 雷横 (whom he helped earlier) to join their cause. After declining the offer, the hot-tempered rebel member Li Kui 李逵 kidnapped the prefect's son and hacked him to pieces. We can see the child again in the 5 of myriads facing an axe (figure 7), which was Li's signature weapon. Zhū was infuriated by this. But knowing that he likely be blamed and executed for the boy's death, he reluctantly agreed to join the rebels on the condition that Li would be barred from returning to the rebel headquarters as long as he remained there [29, pp. 230–231].

Let us now move to *ceki.*[16] *Ceki* (possibly from Hokkien *chít ki* 一枝 'one card') [31, p. 48] are still commercially produced today, and as of writing one could easily buy a deck in the general stores of certain locations such as Bali or from Indonesian online marketplaces. There are several brands of contemporary *ceki*, but their design is very standardized if not homogenized. The contemporary deck below (sample #2h) is an example of a pattern which was already being produced in the late 1800s (see sample #2e).

[13] The exact number of coins in each string varies according to time and region, ranging from 500 to 1000 in which a knot separates each hundred.

[14] Figuratively, the term is also often used in the sense of "vast," "numerous," "countless" and the like.

[15] From the authors' observation of several captioned decks (like sample #1a, 1b): 燕青 Yàn Qīng (1), 武松 Wǔ Sōng (2), 吳用 Wú Yòng (3), 花榮 Huā Róng (4), 李逵 Lǐ Kuí (5), 雷横 Léi Héng (6), 秦明 Qín Míng (7), 朱仝 Zhū Tóng (8), and 宋江 Sòng Jiāng (9). Additionally, Cháo Gài 晁盖, Wáng Yīng 王英, and Hù Sānniáng 扈三娘 are used in bonus cards. Some decks switched certain character's position, and the identifying character attributes in uncaptioned decks is frequently unclear.

[16] Romanized spelling used in various publications include chěki, cherki, chi kee, cuki, tjeki, and so on.

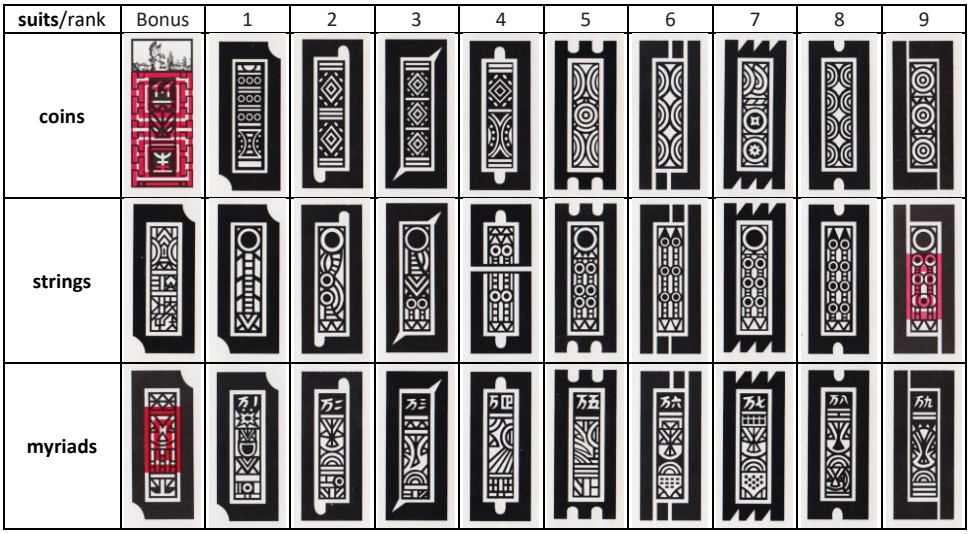

Figure 5. A contemporary *ceki* deck (sample #2h) manufactured by Garda Kencana, procured in 2019. The pattern is identical with published examples going back to the late 1800s. Source: authors

At first glance, one could see *ceki* as a stylized version of *shuǐhǔ pái* falling into Prunner's geometric style category. The basic structure is identical: 3 suits each consisting of 9 cards and a bonus card. The design seems to deliberately leave as little blank space as possible, resulting in a more crowded appearance compared to the Tiānjīn example. Two bonus cards and nine of strings are printed with red mark resembling East Asian seal impressions. Red seal marks are also common in *shuǐhǔ pái*. The Tiānjīn example is slightly unusual in replacing this feature with red fillers in the figures. Otherwise, red seal marks are usually present in bonus cards and some other pips depending on the manufacture. The indices of *ceki* are clearly related to *shuǐhǔ pái* but modified. The small slashes for the 7th rank in the Tiānjīn deck, for example, are turned into larger serrated edges. Several indices like those of the 1s (cut corners) and 5s (two straight lines) are identical. Unlike *shuǐhǔ pái,* only rank indices are provided in *ceki*, so that the exact same black frame is used for same rank across suits. This simplification of the index system can be understood relative to the types of games which are played with these cards, which rarely require players to distinguish between suits. This will be discussed further below.

Many figures in *ceki* are stylized to such a degree that they entirely obscure the suit and rank that they represent. For example, in the Tiānjīn *shuǐhǔ pái* the coin suit is consistently drawn as conventional round coins with square holes. In *ceki* there is only one instance where conventional Chinese coins are shown, in the 7 of coins, while the rest deviate quite significantly. In the 2–4 of coins only square holes are shown. In the 5–6 and 8–9 of coins, only round outlines are shown.

For rank, let us look at the 2 of strings as an example. In the Tiānjīn example the rank can be easily inferred by identifying two black circles. In *ceki*, the 2 of strings confusingly has *three* black circles, the same as the 3 of strings, the only difference being the picture composition and black frame indices. Other cards whose images seems to mismatch their rank include the 4, 7, and 9 of coins, and the 5 and 9 of strings. The rank in the myriad suit is the least ambiguous as their Chinese numerals, while somewhat distorted, are still legible. The human figures however are heavily abstracted into geometric, almost cubist faces. It is likely that the same characters as *shuǐhǔ pái* are used, though this is difficult to confirm. In *ceki*'s 8 of myriads, the presence of two faces suggest that the figure is indeed Zhū Tóng with the prefect's child (figure 6). The child is absent in the 5 of myriads, but in this case Li Kui's identity may be indicated by his axe, possibly abstracted into the semi-circle shape seen on the right area (figure 7). This is however difficult to ascertain without corroborating ancestral decks, and identifying attributes for the rest of the figures are currently unclear.

Figure 6. Illustrations of Zhū Tóng with the prefect's child (shown in red arrow). Left: 1657 edition of Water Margin. Center: Tiānjīn *shuǐhǔ pái* (sample #1c). Right: *ceki* deck (sample #2h). Source: Harvard-Yenching Library (no. 990080403800203941), authors.

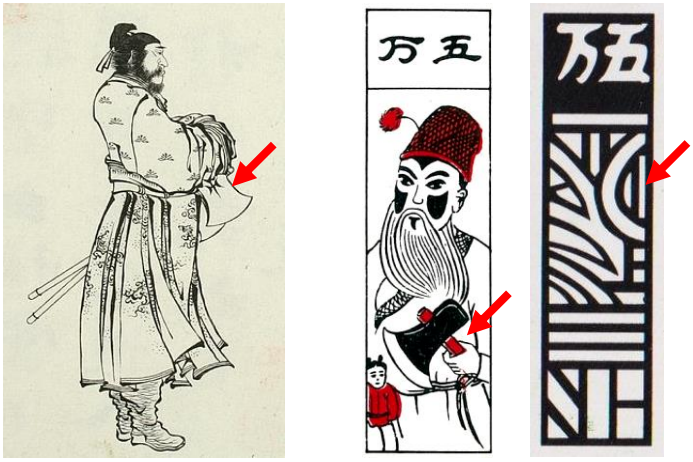

Figure 7. Illustrations of Li Kui with his axe (shown in red arrow). Left: 1883 Japanese edition of Water Margin. Center: Tiānjīn *shuǐhǔ pái* (sample #1c). Right: *ceki* deck (sample #2h). Source: Waseda University (no. 文庫11 D0247), authors.

Perhaps because of its heavy stylization and Sino-centric references, the origin of the figures and underlying suit system in *ceki* cards is entirely lost to Indonesian players. This is further reinforced by the fact that some games played with *ceki* decks are perfectly possible to be played without knowing the suit system. Instead of dividing the deck into suits and ranks, Siem's compilation [1] shows that indigenous Indonesian players often assigned individual card names based on rudimentary visual interpretation, which varies greatly from region to region. Some of these can be seen in table 2 below. The 2 of coins for example have been variously interpreted as two holes (*plompong*), nutmegs (*jabog* = *jebug*?), coins (*picing* = *picis*), drums (*tambur*), and eyes (*mata*), none of which are extended to other cards of the same suit. In Banjarmasin, the figure in the 1 of myriads was interpreted and called *nyonyah* 'lady.' Those familiar with *Water Margin* however would perhaps regard this as unusual as there are very few females among the novel's hero roster. In fact, the novel tends to view females in low regard [32]. Among captioned *shuǐhǔ pái* that the authors have observed, only Hù Sānniáng (nicknamed "Ten Feet of Blue" 一丈青) is the recurring female, and she is usually featured in the bonus cards. The 1 of myriads usually features Yàn Qīng 燕青. In some illustrated editions of *Water Margin*, Yàn is depicted wearing a flower in his headgear.[17] The sunburst-like pattern in *ceki*'s 1 of

[17] See for example 1657 edition held by Harvard-Yenching Library (no. 990080403800203941) and 1883 Japanese edition held by Waseda University (no. 文庫11 D0247).

myriads figure might have been a flower and interpreted as such by Banjarmasin players,[18] but this was mistaken as part of a female hair piece, so the figure came to be called a lady.

Table 2. Some regional Indonesian names of individual *ceki* cards which ignore the suit system, as compiled by Siem [1].

Image						
Rank	1			2		
Suit	coins	strings	myriads	coins	strings	myriads
regional names						
Yogyakarta	kasut	bedor	gundhul	plompong	dengkek	loro cina
Klungkung	likas	lojor	cina	jabog dua	dengkek	celik
Banjarmasin	kasut	panjang	nyonyah	tambur dua	téngkong	miring
Makassar	tikara	lambusu	cina	picing duwa	(n/a)	kondé
Ambon	tikar	panjang	cina	dua mata	bongkok	miring

Dragon and Ujang Omi Deck

The ancestor of *ujang omi* is a specific type of early Latin suited cards often called "dragon cards", so called because of the distinctive dragons in the aces [16, p. 8], [33]. Before the standardization of regional types, dragon cards were known to be used in several European regions including the Iberian Peninsula, Netherlands, Italy, Malta, and Sicily, but their popularity was often short-lived. Portugal was the last European nation to produce them on a large basis, and so the type also came to be known as the Portuguese type in Western publications. While the deck is not very popular in Europe, it saw widespread dispersal outside Europe by Spanish and Portuguese seafarers, with 16th century examples attested as far away as Peru, Mexico (sample #3b), India, and Japan [7], [16, pp. 19–21], [27]. To illustrate the visual characteristics of this card type, the authors will use an example deck printed in 1567 Antwerp (sample #3a):[19]

suits/rank	ases (aces)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8-9	sotas (jacks)	cabalos (cavalier)	reis (kings)
ouros (coins)			(n/a)					...			
paus (clubs)											
copas (cups)											
espadas (swords)											

Figure 8. A dragon deck manufactured by Gilis van den Bogarde in 1567 Antwerp (sample #3a), with 8-9 pip cards omitted. The terms used here are Portuguese. Source: Nationaal Museum van de Speelkaart (no. S01425).

[18] Assuming they use the same pattern.

[19] It is worth noting that this deck was only (re)discovered and identified as recently as 2021 by Marcus Richert, so research into these so-called "dragon cards" is still an active area. This deck is probably also a precursor to Japanese *tenshō karuta* cards. See Ebashi [33].

The deck consists of 48 cards arranged in 4 suits: coins (Portuguese *ouros*, literally 'gold'), swords (*espadas*), cups (*copas*), and clubs (*paus*). Each suit contains an ace, 2-9 pip cards (8 and 9 omitted in the table above), and three court cards. The cup suit is rendered with what appears to be lids, resulting in an orb-on-stem shape. The club suit resembles knobby tree branches, a visual preserved in Spanish decks. The sword and club suits are arranged in intersecting fashion, a feature which is also present in the Mamluk deck, and which is preserved in several Italian patterns. As previously mentioned, the aces feature dragons. They all have wings, lacked feet, and hold their respective suit symbols within their jaws. The court cards consist of seated kings (*reies*), cavaliers (*cabalos*) on horses, and female jacks (*sotas*) dressed in long gowns. Seated kings and female jacks were eventually abandoned in favour of standing kings and male jacks in Spanish decks but are preserved in several Italian regional styles. The example above and all others decks outside Europe feature no indices for rank or suit, but there are European dragon decks which feature indices (see sample #3c).

Let us now move to *ujang omi*. Compared to *ceki*, the production of *ujang omi* is very limited. The printing technology that enabled dragon decks does not seem to have been adopted in south Sulawesi, resulting in an artisanal card making tradition that is almost exclusively handmade and small scale. The only industrially produced *ujang omi* deck that the authors have found so far is an imported deck made around 1929 by A. van Genechten, a large card producer based in Turnhout, Belgium (sample #4i).[20] Due to this small-scale nature, the standards of *ujang omi* are rather loose. Several decks which the authors examined show several distinct design variations which has not been properly classified, though the basic Latin suit structure is still visible and consistent. To illustrate this, the authors will use two example decks (sample #4e, 4f) made somewhere in south Sulawesi before 1931, which can be seen below:

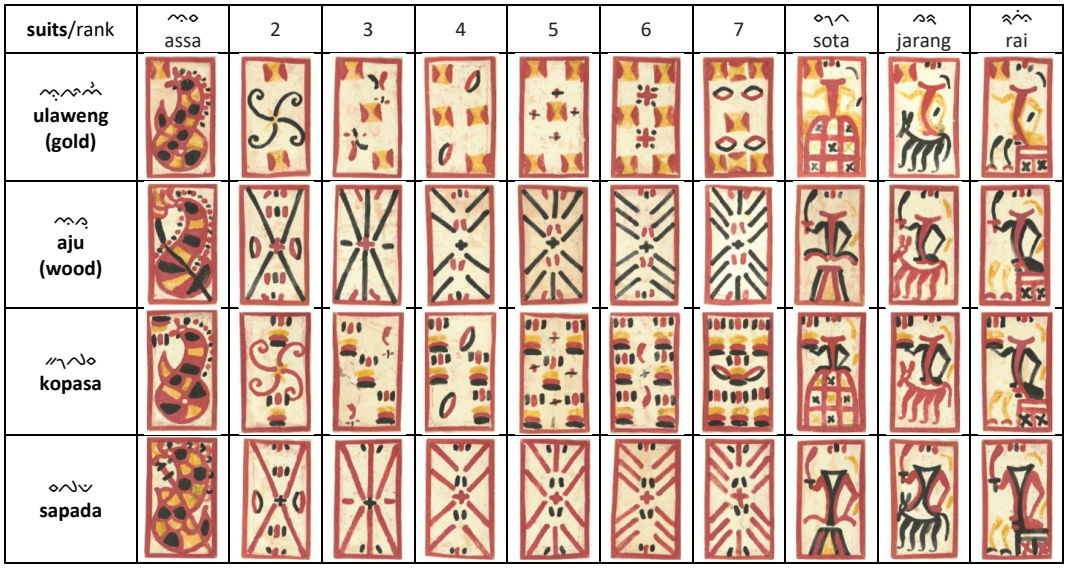

Figure 9. An *ujang omi* deck of unknown manufacture procured from South Sulawesi in 1931 (sample #4e). The terms used here are Buginese. Source: Wereld Museum (no. TM-668-201).

[20] As discussed by Depaulis [6, p. III], this was misidentified by the International Playing-Card Society as "Javanese" pattern, but nevertheless formally catalogued it with the designation IP-1.4. See also Umebayashi [37, p. 218].

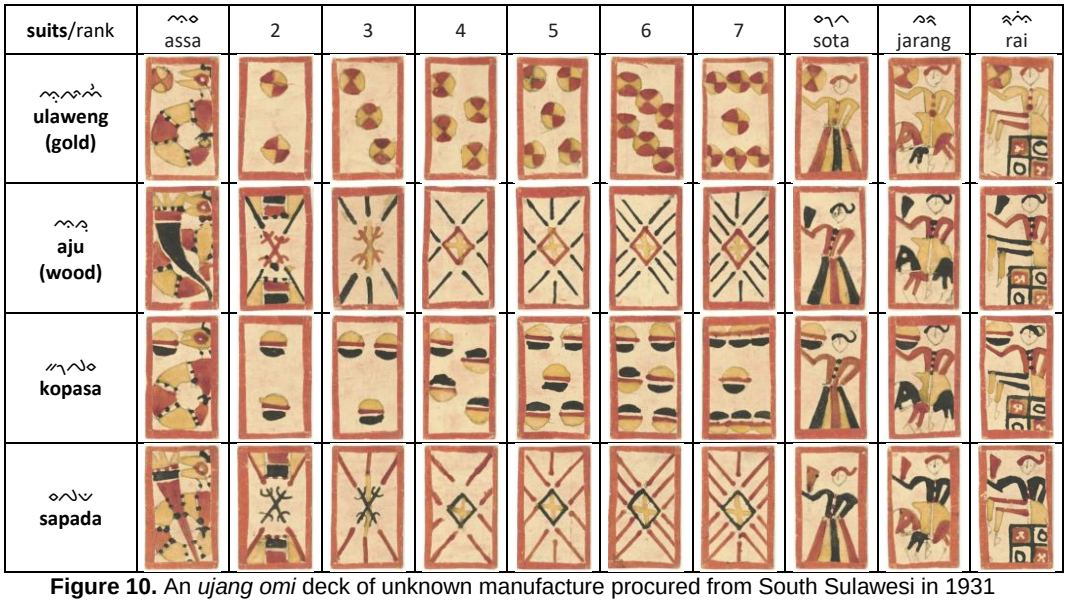

Figure 10. An *ujang omi* deck of unknown manufacture procured from South Sulawesi in 1931 (sample #4f). The terms used here are Buginese. Source: Wereld Museum (no. TM-673-3).

Each deck consists of 30 cards arranged in 4 suits: coins (*ulaweng* in Bugis, *bulaéng* in Makassar, both literally mean 'gold'), *sapada*, *kopasa*, and clubs (*aju,* literally wood). Each suit contains an ace (*assa*), 2–7 pip cards, and three court cards: *sota*, *jarang*, and *rei*. Depaulis [6, p. 38] noted that this overall structure reflects Iberian decks for playing the archaic *hombre* game which do not require 8–9 pips. Based upon the popularity of that game, Depaulis surmised that the deck could not have been introduced to Sulawesi later than 1660. The *omi* game which was derived from the essentially-extinct European *hombre* survives to this day and is still played with locally-manufactured cards.

The adoption of a Portuguese card game in early 1600s is sensible considering the amicable ties between south Sulawesi's elites and Portuguese seafarers in that time frame. This was especially true in the then cosmopolitan Makassar ports of Gowa-Tallo' (around modern city of Makassar), where the influential Karaéng Matoaya (1573–1636) welcomed the Portuguese after Portuguese Malacca fell to the Dutch. Matoaya's successor Karaéng Pattingalloang (1600–54) continued the trend of welcoming Portuguese travellers to his court and admired many aspects of European culture. He often impressed European visitors with his scholarly knowledge, shrewd diplomacy, and fluent Portuguese [6, p. 30], [34]. The introduction of Iberian decks in Bugis-speaking areas may have occurred slightly later than in Makassar, and its spread may have been influenced by the political ascendence of the Bugis after Gowa-Tallo' defeat by the Dutch in the Makassar War (1666–9).

The most significant feature of the dragon decks, the dragons, are consistently used in the aces of the above examples and all known *ujang omi* decks, although sometimes they are heavily abstracted. A noteworthy feature of *ujang omi*'s dragons is the consistent omission of wings, which seems to conform with traditional Indonesian depictions of dragons as serpentine *naga*.[21] Court cards tend to preserve more of the dragon deck's original visual aspects than the pips, as we shall see. The jacks are women as can be seen from their use of wide European style skirts, the cavaliers are equipped with horses, and the kings are seated. There are several other decks which use male jacks and standing kings, but this seems to be the minority. Jacks and kings preserved their original Portuguese terms, while cavaliers came to be known as *jarang* meaning 'horse' in both

[21] For the symbolic importance of *naga* in Indonesian cultures, see Wessing [40].

Bugis and Makassar. Additionally, the deck features no indices, nor do any other *ujang omi* that have been seen.

From the suit names, we can see that the coin and club suits are translated into local terms as *ulaweng/bulaéng* and *aju*. The sword and cup suits however preserved the original Portuguese terms which are not directly translatable into 'swords' and 'cups.' This suggest that the original objects of these suits are not consistently understood, which could explain the shape conflations seen in many decks such as the above. The pips of swords and clubs are conflated into straight lines which are only differentiated by color (figure 11). The presence of hilts and cross guards in the court cards of sample #4e suggest that both suits have become swords. On the other hand, the court cards of sample #4f suggest that both suits have instead become clubs. The prototype pattern of intersecting swords/clubs is preserved in the above examples, but there are decks which arrange them instead into a radiating pattern (for example #4a, 4b). In sample #4f, the prototype cups have lost their stems resulting in a ball-like figure for the *kopasa* symbol which is very similar to a coin. The striped coloring in the prototype cups is surprisingly preserved, which thereby became the differentiating feature from the coin suit. By comparison, the stem is preserved in sample #4e. But it is apparent that the card makers were not familiar with European cups, nor did they interpret the *kopasa* suit as such, because they are always held upside-down by the court cards (although curiously, the ace dragon held it right side up). It should be noted that there are *ujang omi* decks where the four suits all have distinctive shapes, but more often they become abstract symbols that are difficult to recognize as real-world items, not unlike French suit symbols.

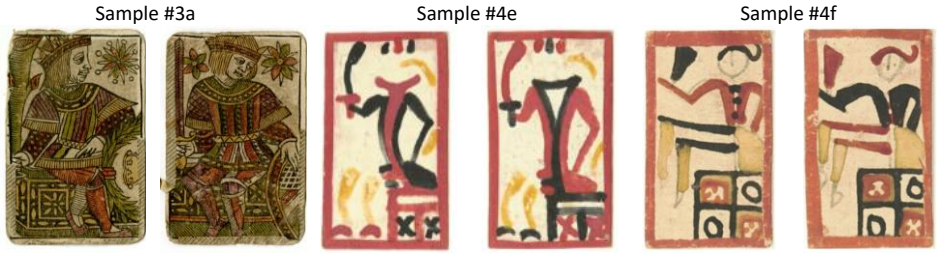

Figure 11. Shape conflation of clubs and swords in sample #4e and 4f. Source: Nationaal Museum van de Speelkaart (no. S01425), Wereld Museum (no. TM-668-201, TM-673-3).

Figure 12. Simplification of cups in sample #4e and 4f. Source: Nationaal Museum van de Speelkaart (no. S01425), Wereld Museum (no. TM-668-201, TM-673-3).

Despite the visual conflation and abstraction described above, this did not seem to pose a problem to south Sulawesi players as evident by the deck's proliferation. The process is perhaps comparable to the progressive simplification of Japanese *tenshō karuta* 天正カルタ decks, which are distantly related to *ujang omi* by being common descendants of Portuguese dragon decks. To quote Mew Lingjun Jiang [7, p. 66] "creating a vaguely recognizable shape with efficiency […] was more important than exactly reproducing the detailed figures of early European playing card designs." *Ujang omi* design may have followed similar principle; as long as the figures within a deck remained recognizable as

distinct game pieces (either by shape or color in addition to name), lack of reference to real world items was not an issue. This observation however has not taken into account some attested ornate variations, which are outside the scope of this paper.

CONCLUSION

Ceki and *ujang omi* are interesting cases of cosmopolitan historic exchange woven into mundane, everyday objects in Indonesia. Unlike previous remarks on these cards, this study attempts to focus more on the visual design *ceki* and *ujang omi*, revealing various changes in which the foreign prototypes became local. Their overall suit system still marks them as clear descendants of Chinese and Portuguese cards, but their visual abstractions make them unique from their ancestors. The visuals of *ceki*, which have been homogenized, are characterized by strong geometric stylization. The underlying suit and rank are obscured, due to the stylization and Sino-centric source material which are not widely understood by Indonesian players. The visuals of *ujang omi* are based on looser standards. The naturalistic depiction in the prototype Portuguese dragon deck is generally simplified and suit shapes are often conflated. Comparison to more variations of *ujang omi* however is needed to make a more definitive evaluation and classification of their visuals.

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DISCLAIMER

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