

## **Technology and Production Process of Bajau Traditional Pottery in Pulau Selakan Semporna**

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This paper aims to provide an initial background of the process of making traditional ceramic pottery of culture heritage. Ceramic pottery is one of the hallmarks of Sabah's heirloom, not only use as cooking and storage containers but also closely linked with folk cultures and heritage. The Bajau Laut ethnic community of Semporna or better known as the Sea Gypsies, mostly are boat dwellers and work as fishermen in the coast. Therefore, this research aims to explore the traditional pottery making in Sabah, by investigating the background history of Lapohan pottery. This study is also based on the chronological process of making pottery and taboos of the process of preparing the clay, forming, decoration technique, motif application and firing techniques. The relevant information for the study will be gathered from field study, including observation, in-depth interview and video recording. In-depth interviews will be conducted with several potters and the conversation and pottery making process will be recorded in order to understand the actual process of making Lapohan.

**Keywords :** Bajau Laut, Culture, Lapohan ,Traditional Pottery.

### **Introduction**

Culture is what most people are proud of because it is what gives one a sense of belonging. It is often referred to as the totality of people's ways of life. Culture therefore, is what people learn within their environment to keep life going. It is what is done in conformity with the established rules and customs of a given society. Culture covers such aspect of life as agriculture, architecture, social life, religion, technology, art and craft.

The relationship between art and culture have had a long history, furthermore according Chia (2005) studies on pottery are invaluable for the historians, archaeologist and anthropologist in understanding and reconstructing the history, culture and ancient arts as well as to understand the historical stages of a nation's progress and its civilization. Ahmad Fauzi (2009) say that, ".... The production of ceramics is one of the oldest activities in the history of human life." Furthermore Shamsu (2005) clarifies that pottery is "..... one of the earliest handicrafts which were created by human civilization." According from Chia (2005) Year 2006 a group of archaeologist researcher from Universiti Sains Malaysia had found that traditional pottery (Lapohan) already exist since 3000 years before in Tengkorak Cave in Semporna. Besides the similarity of lapohan can see it from shape and process of making lapohan. Azmi Ariffin (2015) In Malaysia, the inventions of pottery was an indication of the beginning of civilization; it is irrefutable evidence of the origins of the primal communities referred to as the Malay. According to Norton (1956) Primitive pottery making is almost universal in association with early man over the whole surface of the earth, and because communication was practically non-existed, we are led to the conclusion that it evolved independently in many regions.

### **Background History of Lapohan**

Semporna area is covered a land area of 442 square miles and is located near international waters bordering Indonesia and the Philippines. Locality found in the southeastern part of Sabah, Malaysia. Located in 49 circulated islands around Semporna Peninsular, there are more than

119 villages.

Traditional pottery produced in Semporna is known as Bajau pottery. Many of the traditional potters started as a small family operations set up to produce traditional pottery lapohan (clay stove) for personal domestic needs. Unglazed pot for domestic use are made today in some rural part of Sabah which is Pulau Selakan, Semporna. Furthermore, knowledge and skill of potting is rapidly being lost.

In our preliminary conceptual framework, conceptual in the process making of traditional ceramic pottery (lapohan) (eg, clay preparation, forming, shaping, decoration, firing process) are categorized under the cultural heritage.

### Pulau Selakan

Latitude 4.5749 and long titude 118.6945, 13 meters above sea level is located Kampung Selakan in Pulau Selakan, Semporna. Hj Kapital Patal 71 years old, the village headman say, there are 500 people on the island. Most of the villagers work as farmers and fisherman. Pottery making was carried out in this village a long time ago but today none of the residents from this village are engaged in pottery making. However, there are a few ex-potters still living in the village.

Survey at Kg Selakan identified only one potter maker, named Bunga Inuh. She is 58 years old and has had more than 20 years of experience in pottery making. She had learns the art of pottery making from her mother. Since 1920 the traditional pottery stove (Lapohan) already start in Pulau Selakan.

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to, exploring the value and content of Bajau Laut local culture heritage as one of the hallmarks of Sabah's heirloom. The flowchart in Figure 1, showing the framework of the lapohan making process with several potters.



Figure 1: Framework of the lapohan making process

### Process of Making Lapohan

The basic of any pottery form is preparation of clay. After mining, sifting out the impurities, and adding water, the clay is ready for wedging and mixing with local black sand (*gosong*). It is essential to remove the air bubbles and achieve a uniform consistency before making a form. It

does not require special equipment but it is an acquired skill.



Local Black Sand



Wedging and mixing process

To make hand built pottery stove, the paddle and anvil method is used. A potter sits cross-legged with a square, straw-filled cushion in his lap, which serves as a base to rotate and shape the clay. A wad of wet sticky clay is flattened with the palm of the hand. The walls of the pot are formed by beating the exterior with a wooden paddle while holding a baked clay anvil on the interior. During beating, the paddle is dipped in seawater to prevent it from sticking to the clay. This process continues until the desired shape and thickness are achieved.



Forming and shaping process using handbuilt technique

### Pottery Decorative Styles

Not only can clay objects be made in a limitless variety of shape, their surfaces can also be manipulated in many ways to alter the texture, color and overall appearance of the formed pieces. A repetitive, geometric design is often impressed around the shoulder using a carved paddle.

After it is thoroughly dried in the sun, the pot is fired covered with straw and woods. This method of making vessels is one of the oldest-known crafts. It began in the Neolithic period and continues today with very little change in technique.



Bone Dry, product ready for firing



Firing technique process



Finish Product

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study has shown that the number of traditional potters in the area of study has very much decreased because many of the potters are elderly women who are not strong enough to work in the fields but, unfortunately, the younger generations do not seem to be interested in learning the craft of making hand-built pottery. Therefore, the recommendations are parents at home should encourage the art of traditional pottery and the skill should be taught at all levels of our education system.

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**Interview:**

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