

A Study of Lapohan Traditional Pottery Making in Selakan Island, Semporna Sabah: An Initial Framework

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Abstract : This paper aims to provide an initial background of the process of making traditional ceramic pottery, focusing on the materials and the influence 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. This ethnic community is famous for their own artistic traditional heirloom, especially the traditional hand-made clay stove called Lapohan. It is found that in the daily life of Bajau Laut community, Lapohan (clay stove) is used to prepare the meal and as a food warmer while they are at the sea. Besides, Lapohan pottery conveys symbolic meaning of natural objects, which portrays the identity, and values of Bajau Laut community. It is acknowledged that the basic process of making potterywares was much the same for people all across the world, nevertheless, it is crucial to consider that different ethnic groups may have their own styles and choices of raw materials. Furthermore, it is still unknown why and how the Bajau Laut ethnic of Semporna get started making their own pottery and to survive until today by heavily depending on the raw materials available in Semporna. In addition, the emergent problem faced by the pottery maker in Sabah is the absence of young successor to continue the heirloom legacy. Therefore, this research aims to explore the traditional pottery making in Sabah, by investigating the background history of Lapohan pottery and to propose the classification of Lapohan based on design and motifs of traditional pottery that will be recognised throughout the study. It is postulated that different techniques and forms of making traditional pottery may produce different types of pottery in terms of surface decoration, shape, and size that portrays different cultures. This study will be conducted at Selakan Island, Semporna, which is the only location that still has Lapohan making. 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. The findings hope to provide several types of Lapohan based on different designs and cultures, for example, the one with flat-shape design or has round-shape on the top of clay stove will be labeled with suitable name based on their culture. In conclusion, it is hoped that this study will contribute to conservation for traditional pottery making in Sabah as well as to preserve their culture and heirloom for future generations.

Keywords : Bajau Laut, culture, Lapohan, traditional pottery

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