

Production of Kuron Pottery and Traditional Local Medicinal Practices in Sabah: An Analysis of the Local Wisdom of the Dusun Tindal Community

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ABSTRACT

Kuron pottery is one of the cultural heritage crafts of the Dusun Tindal community in Kota Belud, Sabah, reflecting the community's ability to utilize natural resources through traditional technology that has been passed down from generation to generation. In addition to serving as traditional cooking utensils, kuron pottery is also associated with local traditional medicinal practices, particularly in the preparation and storage of herbal remedies that form part of the community's indigenous knowledge system. Although previous studies have discussed the production process, functions, and aesthetic values of kuron pottery, its relationship with traditional medicinal practices has received limited scholarly attention. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the local wisdom embedded in the production of kuron pottery and its role in the traditional medicinal practices of the Dusun Tindal community in Sabah. This study adopts a qualitative approach through fieldwork involving in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and document analysis. The findings of this study contribute to the documentation of intangible cultural heritage and enhance the understanding of the local wisdom of the Dusun Tindal community as a foundation for preserving the cultural heritage of Sabah.

Keywords: Kuron pottery, traditional medicine, local wisdom, Dusun Tindal, cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural heritage of the indigenous communities of Sabah represents a valuable body of knowledge that has evolved through the long-standing interaction between humans and the natural environment. Through experience, observation, and the continuous transmission of knowledge across generations, these communities have developed diverse forms of indigenous knowledge encompassing traditional technology, natural resource management, handicrafts, food practices, and traditional medicine. This inherited knowledge is known as local wisdom, a knowledge system that emerges from the community's lived experiences in adapting to their environment and fulfilling their daily needs.

Among the Dusun Tindal community in Kota Belud, Sabah, one of the most significant manifestations of local wisdom is the production of kuron pottery. *Kuron* is a traditional clay vessel handcrafted using manual techniques without the aid of modern technology. Every stage of its production from the selection of clay, shaping, drying, to firing demonstrates the community's extensive knowledge of natural materials and traditional technology developed through decades of accumulated experience. These skills have been transmitted both orally and through practical training from one generation to the next, making *kuron* pottery an important symbol of the cultural identity of the Dusun Tindal community.

Although *kuron* is commonly recognized as a traditional household utensil for cooking and storing food, its role in the community extends far beyond domestic use. Based on indigenous knowledge inherited by the local community, *kuron* is also closely associated with traditional medicinal practices. These clay vessels are used in the preparation and storage of herbal remedies made from locally available medicinal plants. Their use is influenced not only by practical considerations but also by the community's accumulated knowledge of the properties of natural materials and the beliefs embedded within their traditional healthcare system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study on the local wisdom embedded in pottery production was conducted by Eliean Hooper (2000), who associated the development of pottery with the discovery of fire as an essential element in human life. Fire has always played a crucial role in human survival and was therefore carefully maintained to prevent it from being extinguished. Early communities observed that soil became hard after prolonged exposure to the heat of fire. This observation inspired the realization that clay could be fired to produce stronger and more durable pottery. Ancient people often built fires in shallow pits, and over time they noticed that the surrounding soil became hardened. This phenomenon led them to understand that clay could be intentionally fired and hardened to create pottery.

Local wisdom refers to a knowledge system developed through the community's long-term experience, observation, and interaction with the natural environment. This knowledge evolves gradually through informal learning processes and is transmitted from one generation to the next through practice, observation, and oral communication. Within indigenous communities, local wisdom encompasses not only the skills required to produce traditional products but also cultural values, beliefs, social norms, and sustainable approaches to managing natural resources.

According to Warren, Slikkerveer, and Brokensha (1995), indigenous knowledge is a body of knowledge developed by a community based on its experiences of interacting with both the physical and social environment. This knowledge continuously evolves in response to changing circumstances while retaining the cultural foundations of the community that created it. In the context of the indigenous communities of Sabah, local wisdom is reflected in various fields, including agriculture, traditional house construction, weaving, textiles, pottery, and traditional medicine. A review of the literature indicates that previous studies on *kuron* pottery have primarily focused on production technology, aesthetic values, utilitarian functions, and its significance as a traditional handicraft. In contrast, studies on traditional medicine in Sabah have mainly examined medicinal plants, healing methods, and indigenous beliefs, with little attention given to their relationship with material culture such as pottery.

Studies on local wisdom in traditional medicine have been discussed by Patthira (2013), who argues that local wisdom is possessed by traditional healers who understand indigenous knowledge related to human physical and mental health. This view is supported by Norlizawati and Rahimah (2013, p. 131), who explain that traditional medicinal wisdom involves the use of natural resources as remedies and has been inherited through generations within local communities.

According to Nurul Aisyah et al. (2021), *kuron* pottery is the only traditional handicraft of the Dusun Tindal ethnic group produced using clay as its primary material. *Kuron* pottery serves various functions closely associated with the daily lives of the Dusun Tindal community, including cooking, transporting, and storing household items. Consequently, *kuron* pottery emerged as a response to the practical needs of everyday life while reflecting the community's cultural values, indigenous knowledge, and inherited wisdom passed down through generations.

Based on the findings of previous studies, the researcher identified the need to conduct a more focused analysis of the local wisdom embedded in the production of *kuron* pottery and its relationship with traditional medicinal practices in Sabah. This study aims to address the existing research gap by examining the interconnectedness of indigenous knowledge and the daily lives of the Dusun Tindal community.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the local wisdom embedded in the production of *Kuron* pottery and its relationship with traditional medicinal practices among the Dusun Tindal community in Kota Belud, Sabah. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, beliefs, and lived experiences that are transmitted through generations.

Study Area and Participants

The study was conducted in Kampung Malangkap Kapa and Kampung Malangkap Tiong, Kota Belud, Sabah, where the tradition of Kuron pottery production is still practised by the Dusun Tindal community. A total of three key informants were selected using purposive sampling, as they possessed extensive knowledge and practical experience relevant to the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it enables the selection of participants who possess specialised indigenous knowledge that is not widely available within the community (Patton, 2015).

The participants consisted of two experienced Kuron pottery makers, who have been actively involved in the production of traditional pottery for many years, and one community member who is both a Kuron pottery collector and a traditional medicine practitioner. The two pottery makers provided detailed information regarding the selection of clay, pottery-making techniques, firing methods, utilitarian functions, and the transmission of pottery-making knowledge. Meanwhile, the collector and traditional medicine practitioner contributed valuable insights into the cultural significance of Kuron pottery, its traditional medicinal applications, and the indigenous beliefs associated with its use. Collectively, these informants provided complementary perspectives that enabled a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Kuron pottery production and traditional medicinal practices.

Data Collection

Fieldwork was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted at locations convenient to the participants, primarily at their residences and pottery-making sites. An interview guide was prepared to ensure consistency while allowing sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and indigenous knowledge. The interviews focused on the production process of Kuron pottery, including clay selection, shaping techniques, firing methods, utilitarian functions, traditional medicinal practices, and the cultural beliefs associated with the use of Kuron pottery.

Participant observation was conducted throughout the fieldwork to document the complete pottery-making process, including the preparation of raw materials, shaping techniques, drying, firing, and the practical use of Kuron pottery in everyday life and traditional medicinal practices. Detailed field notes and photographic documentation were recorded to complement the interview data and provide contextual evidence of the observed activities.

Document analysis was undertaken by reviewing books, journal articles, archival materials, and previous studies related to indigenous pottery, traditional medicine, local wisdom, and the cultural heritage of the Dusun Tindal community. These documentary sources provided historical and contextual information that supported the interpretation of the empirical findings.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts, field notes, observation records, photographs, and documentary materials were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to local wisdom in Kuron pottery production, traditional medicinal practices, indigenous technological knowledge, ecological understanding, and cultural beliefs. The identified themes were subsequently synthesised to develop the Conceptual Model of Local Wisdom in Kuron Pottery Production and Traditional Medicinal Practices among the Dusun Tindal Community.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating information obtained from in-depth interviews, participant observation, photographic documentation, and document analysis. Comparing evidence from these multiple sources strengthened the credibility and dependability of the findings.

To further improve credibility, member checking was conducted by discussing selected interpretations and research findings with the informants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their knowledge, experiences, and cultural perspectives. In addition, prolonged engagement during field visits enabled the researcher to build rapport with the participants and gain a deeper understanding of the local cultural context.

Prior to data collection, the objectives and procedures of the study were clearly explained to all participants. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained before interviews, audio recordings, observations, and photographic documentation were undertaken.

The identities and personal information of the participants were treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes. Since the study involved indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage, particular care was taken to respect the cultural values, customs, and intellectual ownership of the Dusun Tindal community. All findings were documented and reported responsibly to ensure that the community's traditional knowledge was represented accurately and respectfully.

RESULTS

Kuron Pottery as a Heritage of Local Wisdom

Discussions of *kuron* pottery have generally focused on its aesthetic value as a traditional handicraft. However, beyond its physical appearance, *kuron* is the product of the community's observations and understanding of the properties of clay, its functional uses, and the surrounding natural environment. The local wisdom embodied in the production of *kuron* pottery can be seen in several aspects, including the careful selection of raw materials (the quality of the clay), traditional handcrafting techniques (performed manually without the use of machines), manual firing methods, and the use of *kuron* vessels for the preparation and storage of food.

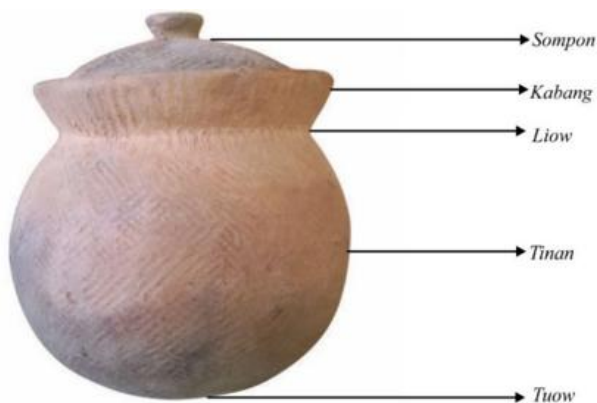


Figure 1: *Kuron* Pottery Body Structure

(Source: Author's Collection)

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of *kuron* pottery, which is divided into five main parts: the lid (*sompon*), mouth (*kabang*), neck (*liow*), body (*tinan*), and base (*tuow*). This structure clearly reflects the local wisdom of the Dusun Tindal community in designing and producing pottery that is well suited to its intended functions.

Local Wisdom in the Production of *Kuron* Pottery

The production of *kuron* pottery originated from the daily activities of women who spent time bathing in the river. According to Nurul Aisyah Othman et al. (2021), women in the past frequently gathered at the river to bathe and cool themselves from the heat of the tropical sun. The riverbanks in the area contained high-quality clay deposits formed from geological processes associated with Mount Kinabalu. These deposits consisted of black clay locally known as *lagit*.

Kuron pottery was eventually developed through the community's local wisdom in recognizing the potential of this clay and transforming it into useful objects for daily life. In its earliest form, *kuron* pottery was used primarily

as a decorative item. However, after the local community experimented with firing the clay and discovered that the pottery became stronger and more durable, *kuron* gradually evolved into a practical utensil for cooking and food storage.

The local wisdom of the Dusun Tindal community is particularly evident in their traditional firing techniques. *Kuron* pottery is produced through a manual smoking and open-firing process without the use of modern kilns or machinery. This traditional method demonstrates the community's indigenous knowledge and technical skills in producing durable pottery using locally available natural resources. The successful application of these manual firing techniques reflects generations of accumulated experience and practical knowledge passed down within the community.

Kuron pottery has played an important role in supporting the livelihood of the Dusun Tindal community, particularly in agricultural activities where it has been widely used for storing food and agricultural produce. Beyond its practical functions, *kuron* also represents an important symbol of the community's cultural identity. It continues to be used during traditional ceremonies and cultural celebrations as part of customary food serving practices, reflecting its enduring significance as both a functional household object and a valuable element of the Dusun Tindal cultural heritage.

The local wisdom associated with the production of *kuron* pottery may be classified into four key aspects: (1) the selection of raw materials, (2) traditional manual production techniques, (3) traditional manual firing methods, and (4) the use of *kuron* pottery as a vessel for food storage.



Figure 2: Kuron Selection raw material

(Source: Author's collection)

The community carefully selects high-quality clay that is durable and suitable for pottery production. The clay is collected from riverbanks and excavated using a traditional tool known as the *gagamas*. High-quality clay is characterized by its black color, plasticity, and ease of shaping, making it ideal for producing *kuron* pottery.



Figure 3: Kuron traditional manual production techniques (Source: Author's collection)

The community also possesses indigenous knowledge of traditional manual production techniques, relying entirely on natural materials rather than modern machinery. Only locally available resources, such as specially

shaped river stones and wooden tools, are used during the manufacturing process. Smooth, rounded, and oval-shaped river stones are employed to shape and compact the clay, ensuring the desired form and structural strength of the pottery.



Figure 4: Kuron traditional manual firing methods

(Source: Author's collection)

The community demonstrates considerable expertise in the traditional firing process. After the pottery has been shaped, it undergoes a manual smoking and firing process to improve its durability and prepare it for use as cooking utensils. This traditional technique reflects the community's local wisdom, as they are able to control the firing temperature effectively without the use of modern temperature-measuring instruments or kilns.



Figure 5: Kuron pottery as a vessel for food storage. (Source: Author's collection)

The community produces *kuron* pottery for practical purposes, particularly as cooking vessels and food storage containers. Beyond its utilitarian functions, *kuron* pottery also serves as an important symbol of the community's cultural identity. It is traditionally used for serving food during cultural ceremonies and customary events, representing a significant element of the cultural heritage of the Dusun Tindal community.

The local wisdom of the Dusun Tindal community is evident in their expertise in selecting high-quality clay, shaping the pottery, conducting the traditional smoking and firing process, and utilizing *kuron* pottery as cooking vessels and food storage containers. The findings indicate that *kuron* pottery was developed in accordance with its intended functions, serving as an essential household utensil in the daily lives of the Dusun Tindal community in Sabah.

Local Wisdom in Traditional Medicine through *Kuron* Pottery

The traditional medicinal practices of the Dusun Tindal community are inseparable from their knowledge of the natural environment and their use of natural resources obtained from the surrounding forests and landscapes. In

this context, *kuron* pottery is regarded not only as an everyday household vessel but also as an important component in the preparation and use of traditional medicines, based on indigenous knowledge and beliefs that have been passed down from generation to generation.

The use of *kuron* pottery in traditional medicine reflects a form of local wisdom that integrates knowledge of natural resources, traditional technology, and an understanding of the properties of different materials. This knowledge has evolved through the community's long-term observation of the effectiveness of traditional medicinal practices and has been transmitted orally across generations.

The local wisdom embodied in the use of *kuron* pottery for traditional medicine can be classified into four main aspects: (1) *kuron* as a medium for preparing traditional herbal remedies, (2) *kuron* as a storage vessel for traditional medicinal preparations, (3) beliefs regarding the unique properties of *kuron* pottery, and (4) the relationship between the natural environment and the traditional medicinal system.



Figure 6: Kuron as a medium for preparing traditional herbal remedies

(Source: Author's collection)

Kuron pottery is made from clay, which is regarded as suitable for the preparation of traditional herbal remedies because it is a natural material that has been used since the time of the ancestors. Although the community may not explain this practice based on modern scientific principles, generations of accumulated experience have shaped the belief that *kuron* is an appropriate vessel for preparing certain traditional remedies. Through repeated use over a long period, this practice has become accepted as part of the community's indigenous knowledge.



Figure 7: Kuron storage vessel for traditional medicinal preparations

(Source: Author's collection)

The selection of *kuron* as a storage vessel is influenced not only by its practical function but also by the community's belief in the natural properties of clay. According to the informants, containers made from natural

materials are considered more compatible with plant-based herbal remedies than modern containers. This belief reflects the close relationship between material culture and the traditional knowledge system practiced by the Dusun Tindal community.



Figure 8: Beliefs regarding the unique properties of *kuron* pottery

(Source: Author's collection)

Belief is an essential component of the community's traditional medicinal system. According to the informants, *kuron* possesses properties that make it suitable for the preparation of traditional remedies because it is made from natural clay. This belief is not based solely on the physical characteristics of the vessel but is also shaped by the community's long-standing experience of using it over several generations. Consequently, this practice has been maintained because repeated experience has demonstrated its perceived effectiveness.



Figure 9: Relationship between the natural environment and the traditional medicinal system

(Source: Author's collection)

In the production and use of *kuron* pottery, the natural elements of earth, water, fire, and plants are closely interconnected in forming the traditional medicinal system of the Dusun Tindal community. Earth provides the clay used to produce *kuron*. Water is essential for shaping the pottery and preparing herbal remedies. Fire is used

both in the firing of the pottery and in the preparation of medicinal decoctions. Plants constitute the primary source of medicinal ingredients. This interrelationship demonstrates that the community perceives nature as an integrated and interconnected system.

According to the informants, *kuron* pottery, being made from natural clay, possesses unique properties that are believed to contribute to healing. They further explained that herbal decoctions prepared in *kuron* pottery are believed to have specific therapeutic qualities and are used to treat a variety of ailments. Consequently, the Dusun Tindal community uses *kuron* as a vessel for preparing traditional medicines to treat illnesses such as stomach pain, flatulence, and other common health conditions.

The local wisdom embodied in the traditional medicinal use of *kuron* pottery can therefore be understood through three main dimensions: its role as a medium for preparing traditional herbal remedies, the community's beliefs regarding the beneficial properties of *kuron* pottery, and the close relationship between the natural environment and the community's traditional medicinal system.

ANYLISIS OF EVOLUTION

Conceptual Model of Local Wisdom in the Production of Kuron Pottery and Traditional Medicine Practices among the Dusun Tindal Community

Based on the analysis of interview data, field observations, and document analysis, this study proposes a Conceptual Model of Local Wisdom in the Production of Kuron Pottery and Traditional Medicine Practices among the Dusun Tindal Community (Figure 10). The model demonstrates that the production of Kuron pottery and the practice of traditional medicine are not independent cultural activities. Instead, they are interconnected components of an indigenous knowledge system that has been developed, practiced, and transmitted across generations.

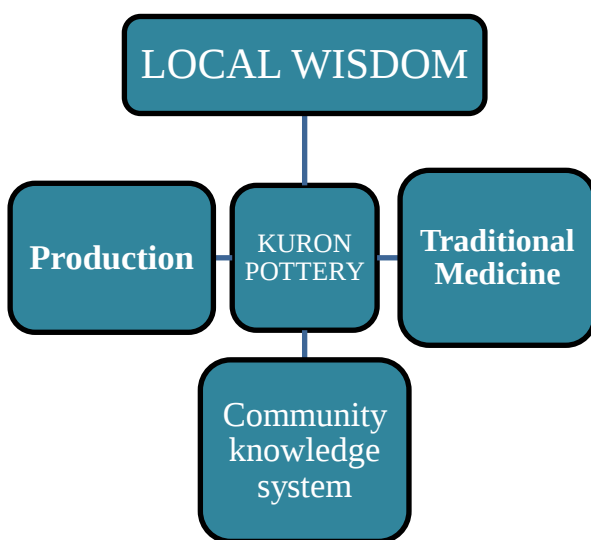


Figure 10: Conceptual Model of Local Wisdom Kuron pottery

The model identifies local wisdom as the core element that underpins the entire indigenous knowledge system of the Dusun Tindal community. This local wisdom has evolved through long-term interaction with the natural environment, practical experience, continuous observation, experimentation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The findings indicate that such knowledge extends beyond the technical skills of pottery making to include its application in traditional healthcare practices.

Dimension of *Kuron* Pottery Production

The first dimension of the model is the production of *kuron* pottery, which demonstrates the community's mastery of traditional technology. The findings reveal that the production process of *kuron* is shaped by four key elements: clay selection, pottery-making techniques, the firing process, and its utilitarian functions.

The selection of clay is based on the community's accumulated experience in identifying the physical characteristics of clay that are suitable for producing durable pottery. This knowledge reflects the community's profound understanding of the natural resources available in their surrounding environment. The shaping of *kuron* is carried out manually using traditional craftsmanship acquired through observation and hands-on practice from an early age. Likewise, the firing process requires extensive knowledge of appropriate types of firewood, firing duration, and temperature control, all of which are based on practical experience rather than modern equipment.

Together, these four elements demonstrate that the production of *kuron* is not merely the manufacture of clay vessels but rather a manifestation of traditional technology that has evolved through the community's long-term experience and adaptation to the natural environment.

Dimension of Traditional Medicinal Practices

The second dimension of the model is traditional medicinal practices, which illustrate how the community utilizes natural resources for healthcare purposes. The findings indicate that these practices are shaped by four principal elements: the use of herbal ingredients, the preparation of traditional medicines, the storage of medicinal remedies, and community beliefs.

The community utilizes a wide variety of local plants as the primary ingredients in the preparation of traditional medicines. Their knowledge encompasses the identification of medicinal plant species, appropriate preparation methods, and their application in treating various illnesses. In several traditional practices documented in this study, *kuron* pottery is also used as a medium for the preparation and storage of specific herbal remedies, based on the community's accumulated experience and customary practices. This demonstrates that *kuron* pottery extends beyond its domestic function to play an important role in supporting the community's traditional healthcare system.

Community beliefs further complement this system, as knowledge and practices inherited through generations have fostered confidence in the suitability of *kuron* pottery for preparing particular traditional remedies. These beliefs are grounded in long-standing empirical experience and have become an integral component of the Dusun Tindal community's indigenous knowledge system.

CONCLUSION

Kuron pottery is not merely a traditional handicraft but also a manifestation of the local wisdom that integrates knowledge of the natural environment, traditional technology, and the healthcare practices of the Dusun Tindal community. This indigenous knowledge reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and their environment while shaping a cultural identity that has been transmitted from one generation to the next. These findings are consistent with the study by Nurul Aisyah et al. (2021), which reported that the selection of high-quality clay represents a form of traditional knowledge inherited across generations. The documentation and preservation of knowledge related to the production and use of *kuron* pottery in traditional medicine are essential to ensure that this cultural heritage remains sustainable and can continue to benefit future generations.

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