

THE UNIQUENESS OF SAYAU KAPA MOMORUN DANCE IN DUSUN TINDAL ETNIC OF KOTA BELUD, SABAH

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ABSTRACT: *The Dusun Tindal ethnic group derives its name from the words 'Dusun' which refers to race or origin and 'Tindal' meaning land or hills. The Dusun Tindal is often associated with a refined ability to produce high-quality handicraft items such as the traditional kuron pottery. Kuron is an integral part of the Sayau Kapa Momorun, a well-known traditional dance performance in Kampung Malangkap Kapa, Kota Belud. The dance is unique due to its significance in the production of kuron. The Dusun Tindal community has turned the process of kuron-making into a traditional dance complete with its own set of movements, music and costumes. This study is an exploration of the uniqueness of the Sayau Kapa Momorun as a dance representation of the traditional kuron pottery of the Dusun Tindal in Kota Belud. The research utilises the fieldwork methods of observation, interview and audio visual recording.*

Keywords: Kuron, Dusun Tindal, Dance Movement, Sayau Kapa Momorun

1. INTRODUCTION

The Kadazan Dusun grouping is the largest indigenous community in Sabah. Approximately 35 subgroups fall under the umbrella of this large grouping with each renown for their strong heritage and cultural traditions. Folkdances and refined traditional pottery skills are among the skills the community is famous for. The Sayau Kapa Momorun, a traditional dance by the Dusun Tindal of Kampung Malangkap Kapa in Kota Belud, has existed since the 1960s and was inspired by the movements in momorun, a pottery-making daily activity usually pursued by the womenfolk in the community.

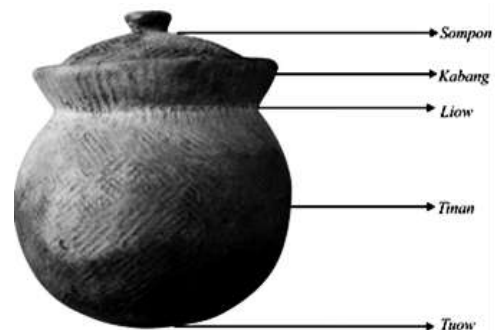
Kuron, produced from grey clay, is made in several sizes. The small kuron, popogong, is usually for kitchen use although it was also utilised for barter trading purposes in the olden days. The modern-day popogong serves a more decorative function and has been extensively commercialised. Its usage is still actively incorporated in the traditional Sayau Kapa Momorun dance which had since evolved into a full-fledged dance complete with its own music accompaniments and costumes. The dance movements reflect not only the processes in making the kuron but also the activities among the womenfolk in Dusun Tindal villages.

The community observes many traditions inherited from their ancestors. These customs and beliefs, closely inter-related to everyday human life, nature and the cosmology, are nurtured and adhered to or diligently practised. The village Headman plays a defining role in ensuring the rites and traditions are observed through ceremonies such as marriages, or in cases of cultural infringement, judgement or penalty (sogit). Although a sizeable proportion of the younger Dusun Tindal generation has embraced either Islam or Christianity, the community on the whole still adheres to the age-old beliefs and traditions of their people. From the perspective of culture and lifestyle, the Dusun Tindal has many similarities with other Kadazan Dusun ethnic groupings in terms of practice, beliefs, language, rites, and traditions.

2. KURON POTTERY

The Kadazan Dusun community is renowned for their skills and expertise in pottery-making. The grey clay that is central in the production of kuron is usually obtained from river banks or areas close to the mountain foothills as in the case of Kampung Malangkap Kapa and Kampung Malangkap Tieng. Kuron in Dusun Tindal means 'pot' used for cooking or keeping food with Kampung Melangkap in Kota Belud still actively producing this craft.

According to an informant who was also the sole kuron producer in her particular area, the pottery has various important functions. Its main use is in the everyday kitchen activity of the Dusun Tindal household whereby kuron would be used for cooking and keeping potable water cool. According to their tradition, food kept in the kuron would keep longer. Yet another benefit of the kuron is its perceived ability to cure ailments or illnesses. The kuron is shaped like a rice pot with five main parts: *sompon* (lid), *kabang* (mouth), *liow* (neck), *tinan* (body) and *tuow* (base).



Picture 1: Kuron Structure

Sources: Source: Researcher's private collection



Picture 2: Kuron body (Tinan)
Sources: Researcher's private collection



Picture 3: Kuron head (Sompon)
Sources: Researcher's private collection

Producing *kuron* pottery is a four-stage process: (1) obtaining the required clay, (2) molding, (3) carving, and (4) baking with a timeframe of about a week between start and completion although the *kuron* output size depends largely on the potter's focus and speed of work. An informant¹ was able to produce at least ten *kuron* in a week although that was her maximum output. The *kuron* potter has to exercise care, patience and diligence in order to produce a work of beauty. According to the informant, a regular customer once shared how drinking water boiled in a *kuron* cured his internal illness. The Dusun Tindal believe the usage of *kuron* imparts luck in one's life. Nowadays, the production of *kuron* still relies on traditional methods although modern equipment is available. *Kuron*-making is yet another alternative means of generating income for Dusun Tindal villagers, even more so with the easy availability of natural materials for its production.

3.SAYAU KAPA MOMORUN DANCE

Sayau in Dusun Tindal means dance movements while *Kapa* refers to an area known for its pottery making in Kampung Malangkap Kapa. *Momorun* meanwhile is the process of producing the *kuron*. This dance has existed since the 1960s and was first inspired by the movements exhibited during the *momorun* by village womenfolk. The small-sized *kuron*, *popogong*, is usually used as kitchenware and was once barter trade commodity in the olden days. *Popogong* has now been commercialised with its function more as a decorative item. It is also used in traditional ceremonies such as in the *Sayau Kapa Momorun* dance during festivals, celebrations or welcoming ceremonies. *Kuron* and *popogong* have since

become established as icons in the handicraft heritage of the Dusun Tindal of Kota Belud.



Picture 4: Popogong
Sources: Researcher's private collection



Picture 5 : Types of Gong
Sources: Researcher's private collection



Picture 6 : Rinagang costume
Source: Researcher's private collection

Sayau Kapa Momorun has evolved to become a part of the traditional dances of the Dusun Tindal community complete with its own set of music accompaniment and costumes. The uniqueness of *Sayau* lies in the accompaniment of traditional gong beatings that follow the rhythm demonstrated during *kuron* making. In terms of costumes, dancers would don the Dusun Tindal *rinagang* which has its own aesthetical elements. This visual demonstration coupled together with the beating of gongs of varying sizes and the *kuron* pottery produce an aesthetically pleasing dance movement sequence rich with Dusun Tindal traditional elements.

4. AESTHETIC MOVEMENT SAYAU KAPA DANCE

The notion of aesthetics and aesthetical values has various interpretations with scholars offering a wide range of meanings. Plato (in Hamidah, 1995) for instance defined aesthetics as referring to a form of beauty, and the role of beautiful characters and perfect laws in literature. Aristoteles perceived beauty as an aspect both good and pleasing while Plotinus wrote of beautiful knowledge and welfare. Beauty was articulated by the Greeks as beautiful thinking and traditions or norms, although they believed the sum meaning of aesthetics or symmetria was based more on personal perceptions.

The concept of aesthetics among the Dusun Tindal is demonstrated in the uniqueness of movements in *Sayau Kapa Momorun*. The dance draws inspiration from the kuron production processes as well as the activities of village womenfolk. According to an informant, the *Sayau Kapa Momorun* movements were originally borrowed from *momigol* and *sumayau*, two other traditional Dusun Tindal dances. The *momigol* dance presents a more gentle range of movements and is performed by women in the mature-age range. *Sumayau* on the other hand is fast-paced and with both male and female dancers.

This dance combination is also used in the *Sayau Kapa* dance. The dance movements here are reminiscent of birds soaring high, reflected in the fingertips turned upwards like wings. The dancers move in rhythm with the beating of gongs, and drag their feet across the dance floor from left to right. The modern version of *Sayau Kapa* incorporates other dance movements and uses recorded music or music from the radio.

The icon and aesthetical elements of *Sayau Kapa* are due to its close interlink with the daily life activities of the Dusun Tindal. The aesthetical value of the dance demonstrated in its various movements portrays the joy of the womenfolk as they work their land. The dance also provides the opportunity for the community to strengthen their bond when it is performed during festivities such as their Harvest Festival and other cultural events.



Picture 7 :Women parcipated sayau kapa momorun dance
Source: Researcher’s private collection



Picture 8 :Female sayau kapa momorun dances



Source: Researcher’s private collection

Picture 9 : Sayau kapa momorun movement
Source: Researcher’s private collection

5. CONCLUSION

The Sayau Kapa Momorun dance tradition of the Dusun Tindal is a cultural practice that should be documented and exposed to the young generation. The various dance elements, musical instruments, and rhythm and rhyme of the dance form part of the symbolic identity of the community; as such, efforts should be undertaken to ensure its survival and continued relevance.

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