

# **TAJAU MOTIVE (CERAMIC) OF IBAN'S PEOPLE BASED ON THE ENVIRONMENT COSMOLOGY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the 7th century to the 11th century, was the start of trading in Santubung, Sarawak. At that time, Santubung was the most well-known trading center. Almost all foreign traders will dock there to do business. It was the beginning of the use of pottery from Chinese merchants. They brought pottery to store food for their sea voyage. Pottery is also used to store a variety of dry foods, beverages, and to keep their properties. During the process of trading occurred, slowly the Iban people started learning the use of Tajau. For the Iban who possess the Tajau, it represents a symbol of status to the owner. The Iban use the pottery for variety of daily usage such as to stock upland rice, store water, palm wine, jewelry. It is also use as a funeral tool, Iban ritual tool and as a punishment in Adat Tusun Tunggu. The Tajau represent the wealth for the Iban, therefore they will strive to own it in addition to hand down it to their descendants. It becomes a very valuable inheritance. Each of the Tajau has variety of motive that is used as a decoration such as flora and fauna, animals, moon, stars, sun and animal faces. Each motive that is created has its own cosmology and it matches each other. They believe the environment surrounded them could give peace and harmony in their daily life until it has become a custom inherited by their ancestors. For example, the moon, animals, the sun give them guidance in their everyday life to hunt, build houses and to starts a journey. Meanwhile for the animals and plants are interdependent with each other to serve as a source of food or a place for shelter. They also believe if they do not follow these beliefs there will be unwanted things occurred that can cause death in the longhouse. Iban cosmology focused on life in everyday life until it becomes a custom to be observed by all Iban.

**Key word :** Ceramic, Iban and Adat Tusun Tunggu.

## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country rich in diversity and racial and ethnic uniqueness. Even with people of different races, but Malaysia does not face the problem of the differences. This makes Malaysia a country full of colours and own uniqueness. Sarawak is known by the name of 'Negeri Bumi Kenyalang' with people from different tribes.

There is about 30 ethnic groups in Sarawak. Iban people is the largest tribe in Sarawak followed by Chinese, Malay, Bidayuh, Melanau and other ethnic tribes. Ibans are divided into several tribes, for example, Balau, Sembayau, Lemanak and others. In ancient times the Iban was very well known as a reliable and courageous fighters in headhunting and piracy. The Iban mainly lives in the rural areas compared to urban areas. This is because many of them practice the traditional economy activities such as farming, animal breeding, and collecting forest produce.

The Iban has their own unique tradition and they hold it strongly to it in their daily life. From a religious perspective, they worship a god called 'Singalang burung' and bird god of war. But now, many of them has converted to Christian.

The Iban customs and culture are important to them. This is so clearly reflected in every ceremony associated with the customs and culture is celebrated with joyous regardless in rural or urban areas even in terms of age groups irrespective whether they are young or old. As a result of this belief of the Iban customs and culture, it still survives until now and will not obsolete in time. Other tribes also have to continue their ancestor's customs and culture so that the new generation will still be able to see and experience the uniqueness of their customs and culture. If this customs and culture is not carried on, possibility the future generation will only learn the customs and culture in the museum or through reading.

## PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The culture of Iban community in Sarawak has been exposed to many cultural influences from outside which resulted in the existence of multiculturalistic element in the indigenous culture:

*"i examine the consequences on iban society of brookes and later, british influences. The brookes introduced to control, administer and sustain the iban as a socio-cultural group in its right with in a multi-cultural Sarawak society"*

[Peter Muluk Kedit(1980:11).Modernization among the Iban of Sarawak,Kuala Lumpur Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia.

This situation also rose because most of Iban community was immigrated from longhouse to the city (urbanization process). Iban community nowadays prefers to be modernized life style and live in the cities instead of staying in the longhouse. During this migration process, there are no longer practices their traditional cultures on their real life. On the other hand, the religion factor also influences Iban community heedless about their traditional culture.

Furthermore, there are too many Tajau where as each motif represent different type of meaning according to which part and division this community allocated. Unfortunately, this situation is much different from those early days compared to now day; it is very hard or rare to find Tajau in their house.

Sometime, even though there are Ibannese lives together in the same division or territory; they do able habitually practice different real life –style culture. There for, it is crucial to study further on this specific research area to understand in –depth on Iban real culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

Among the many people of Asia, those of the great island of Borneo developed a most special and lasting regard for large jars. They used them in their daily lives: to keep water cool and sweet, to store rice and other staples securely from pests, or to brew rice –wine during festivals. Above all, jars were collectors ‘items. The lined the walls of family room and communal galleries. The farmers who owned them knew many different types. Most precious among them jars handed down over the generation. As the treasure *pusaka*, such jar was surrounded with beliefs and legends. They were treated with ceremony and respect. Privileged families used them as ossuary’s for the bones of their dead.

For example the *Iban* have recognized eight types of value jars and have special names like *Ghuchi* or *Gusi*, *Sergiu*, *Ningka Bendar*, *Menaga*, *Bertanda Bendar*, *Begeri*, *Rusa Randok*, *Salang* –alang for them. The *Iban* place high value on the Satsuma jars which they call *singa-raja* (King of lions).

The popularity of jars amongst our people is enormous and they have made use of then for multitude purposes. Apart from the being symbols of wealth and social status, jars are also used in the daily lives of our people, such as to keep water cool and sweet, to keep the food safe from rats and insects and to brew famous rice-wine, *tuak*. Rice- wine is needed for the festivals, events like hair cutting and ear piercing to the major ceremonies of harvest and marriage during which a great amount of rice-wine is consumed by all who participated in the festivity as a form of cleansing.

Jars have inspired elaborate customs and beliefs. In the olden days, if jar was worth 'one slave' and was smashed by someone who could not afford to replace it, he or she would have to become the slave of the injured party for life. Even if he could replace the jar, he still had to make further compensation, usually pigs and chickens to alleviate the distress caused to the injured party. This and other customary laws were imposed to ensure that jars remained relatively safe.

Jar like the *Guchi* or *Gusi* which are associated with myths and belief have been thought to be abodes of spirits and household gods. Some jars are believed to possess the power of foretelling future events and the power of summoning spirit through the sound emitted when struck. Other jar also has believed to possess magical power and can heal illness. Jar likes these are looked upon as something to be respected and avoided as appropriate homage has to be paid to them, to feed them and to take great care of them, otherwise bad fortune would befall the owners. The indigenous people have become so involved with jars they can even differentiate their sexes. A jar which has a higher and wider shoulder is regarded as a female while one having a sloping shoulder and more rounded body is a male.

### **ADAT TUSUN TUNGGU ( Legal culture or Adat Custum)**

Heppell [1975] said this practise for "strengthening the soul" is the *Iban* way of social control mechanism in their society. He pointed out that the ritual (*tunggu*) was the earliest system of making reparation in *Iban* society. However, out of these conversation of ritual payment came out the secular payment of fines and compensation (*rukun*).

Adat Iban [Sarawak 1993:110] states that "*tunggu*" means restitution; and that two idea constitute the rationale of payment: (i) it is a settlement between individuals, and (ii) it also covers 'the idea of appeasement, atonement or restoration of the physical and spiritual well-being of the community'. There is no element punishment. It further adds: "In term of settlement, the offender shall provide "*tunggu*" in the form of "*mungkul*", and in terms of appeasement, atonement or restoration, the offender shall provide "*genselan*", "*pelaso menon*", "*pati nyawa*" or whatever the case maybe".

Example: To defecate in a person's farm is a breach against taboo...The offender shall rectitude or *tunggu* of 4 *mungkul* and a *genselan* of one chicken and *kering semangat*. It means that 4 *mungkul* is a form of settlement to pacify of the farm owner. A *genselan* of a chicken and a *kering semangat* (soul strengtheners) are for the appeasement or atonement of the *padi* spirit and the farm.

They are for restoration of the state of the souls of both the offender and the farm owner to their normal selves for the sake of their physical and spiritual wellbeing.

It should be noted that the monetary value of the *mungkul* is small. In the olden days, the “mungkul” means a small jar. Nowadays, Adat Iban gives the value of one *mungkul* to the equivalent of RM1 (One Malaysian Ringgit). This does not deter from the fact that it is a strong deterrent for an offender not to repeat such act or to prevent others from committing a ritual offence. For the *Iban* strongly believe that any breach against an *adat* without paying a *tunggu* would lead to the offender to become *busong* or spiritually curse.

That means the offender will be visited with ill luck. It is in a way, a psychological deterrent, and an effective mechanism of social pressure by a longhouse community to *adat* offender. Hence, *Iban adat* customs require that in addition to monetary value of reparation, ritual payments have to be made by the transgressors to compensate for damage done on the victims’ souls. The ritual fines were meant for the victims to make propitiatory rites to cleanse the injury against a guidance spirit.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative approach is can be a basic way in conducting a qualitative research. It can describe either explicitly or implicitly, the purpose of the qualitative research, the researcher’s roles and the stages of research and the method in data analysis. There are two qualitative approaches whereas known as ethnography, grounded theory and also referring the theory of Erwin Panofsky, the Art Historian.

### **Primary Data**

Survey is the option to find the problem in this research. Thought observations in Pot of Heritage Earth Ware Pottery Exhibition 2009, showcased in Ceramic Odyssey from China to Ulu, artwork at Kampung Budaya Sarawak, the researcher will find out the ceramic jar (Tajau) used in Iban Fine Customary Law ‘Adat Tusun Tunggu’.






### **Secondary Data**

The source from books, journals and internet will be used as additional references and to gain knowledge and information. There also report from other researchers will be referred to compare the study.

To complete the study references, source from newspaper, magazine and television program will also be used to update information in the area of research.

## RESULTS

Pottery used as a fine for the offense in AdatTusunTunggu in the Iban community

Types of ceramic	Type of guiltiness
1.Uta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disrespect visitors to the house.</li> <li>• Damaging other people's property. Entering the room of woman still in confinement after the 'bermanang' ceremony.</li> </ul>
2.Menukul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hurting people.</li> <li>• Take other people things without informing the owner.</li> </ul>
3.Alas ngerang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cut the 'sengkeyang' tree at other people house because it disturb the paddy owner (spirit).</li> <li>• Quarrel in the house during the ceremonial gathering to redeem the shame of the house owner.</li> </ul>
4.Rusa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People who accused other have the ability to swear (Tepang) to redeem the shame of the accused.</li> <li>• people who insulted someone as 'ulun' slaves is to redeem the shame.</li> </ul>
5.Alas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stealing higher rank people things 'sadu' because it can be accused of taking a charm (batupadi).</li> <li>• Punishing those who fought during the celebrations.</li> </ul>



<p>6.Nangka bertali</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine some who causes a fire at a long house</li> <li>• to redeem offenses of murder</li> </ul>
<p>7.Ningka</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to pay a penalty if someone kills@ repay for life to prevention slaved. Pottery of this type used by the people with position.</li> </ul>

Figure 1

From the research done, the patterns used in the Iban pottery consist of several categories: animal motifs, myths, and cosmology. Here are examples of motifs used:

- a) dragon
- b) flora
- c) fauna
- d) stars
- e) moon
- f) sun
- g) ocean waves
- h) animals

### **Iban motif ceramics selection based on environmental cosmology**

#### **Dragon motif**

According to the Iban belief, dragon motif that is on pottery must be placed in pairs. This is because, the Iban believe that every motive cannot be placed singly or alone. They believe that every living thing in this world are born in pairs and mutually need each other. For example, the male must be partner with female to complete this life. Therefore married couples exist, followed by children and grandchildren. The onset of the spouses, it has now become a big family. So, it has completed their lives in this world. That element is placed in the use of the dragon motif on the Iban pottery.

If the motif drawn singly, it's not completed or called as 'kera sumbang'. When it is incomplete, the Iban believe there will be evil spirits that will come and interfere in turn will cause bad things to happen such as death, drought, and natural disasters. Iban grow rice as their economy, if a long drought occurred will cause the rice will die and the longhouse occupants will fall sick.

In the event of an act of the longhouse that can violate customary law, this will cause bad things to happen. They believe that all acts done daily intertwined with each other. Therefore they have to protect it. (See figure 2)

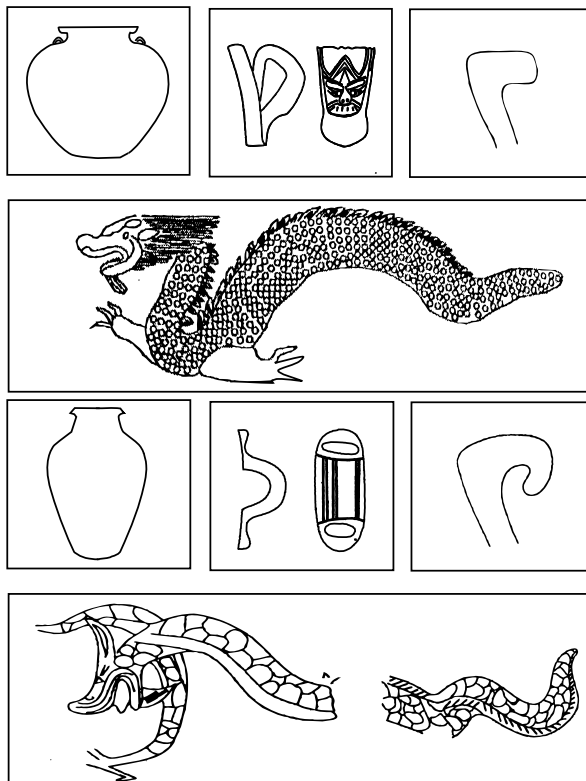


Figure 2

### Flora and Fauna Motif

If you look at the motives on the pottery there are also other motives such as flora and fauna. In Iban belief, they believe in the concept of perfection and harmony. This can be explained by their belief that every living thing lives under one roof or canopy. For example, the creeping plants provide a food source to animals and provide a place to shelter. This concept describes the plants protect and care for the creatures surround it. It was a complete perfection in an Iban motif on pottery. (See Figure 4)



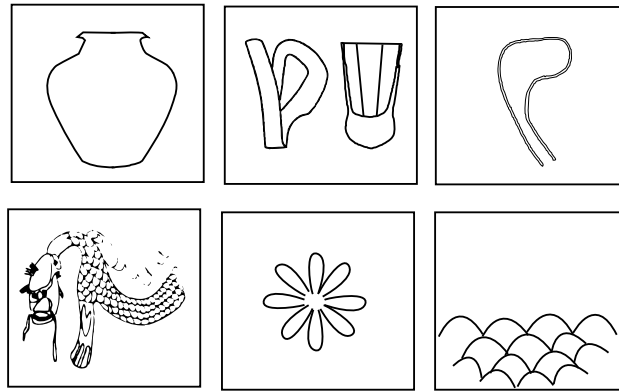


Figure 4

### Star, moon and sun motif

There is also a motif based on the moon, the stars, the sun is on the Iban pottery. The Iban people believe in the existence of the gods in the sky. Thus the motifs used in the pottery. This show greatness, honor with the existence of these gods. Iban believe that their daily lives are intertwined with the universe.

In their belief star motif with diverse vertex represents a significant and has their own importance. They believe on a full moon, the Iban are not allowed to be out of the house, if not follow the traditions of this interest, unfortunate things will happen. (Noria Ana Tugang 2004)

It is clear Iban cosmology emphasizes life in everyday life until it becomes a custom to be observed by all Iban. Iban thought that every life on this planet complements each other. For example, the moon, the stars, the sun provides guidance in daily life for hunting, make a home and start a journey. As for the animals and plants, they need each other to serve as a source of food or as shelter. They also believe if you do not follow these beliefs unwanted things will occur and cause death in the longhouse.

On Tajau Rusa, although no dragon motif is used, but environment elements are used such as stars, moons, and water. This shows the Iban is very impressed with the universe as well as guidance and is also used in their folk customs. To the Iban, these motifs are placed because they believe that these animals face motif has a soul and spirit. These animals serve as guardians of this universe. So the cosmology is complete with the existence of each motif in the Tajau.

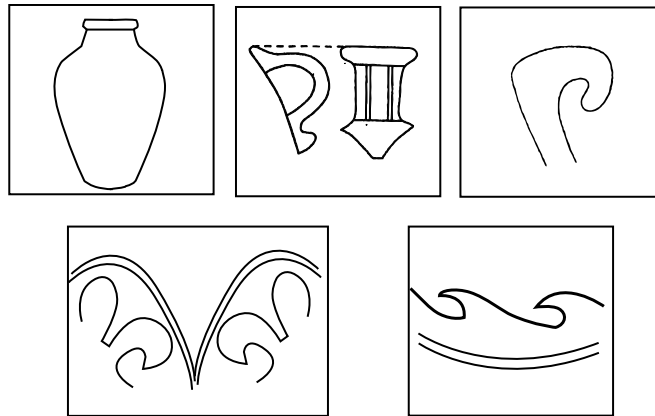


Figure 5

### Animal faces decoration

If it is look at each of the Tajau that is used by the Iban, there are animal faces decorations on each handle of the Iban pottery. The Iban belief there is a spirit at the animal. They consider it has soul and can give zest of life to them and also provide supernatural power. The animals function as a universe protector. Thus the cosmology is complete with the existence of the motif on each Tajau.

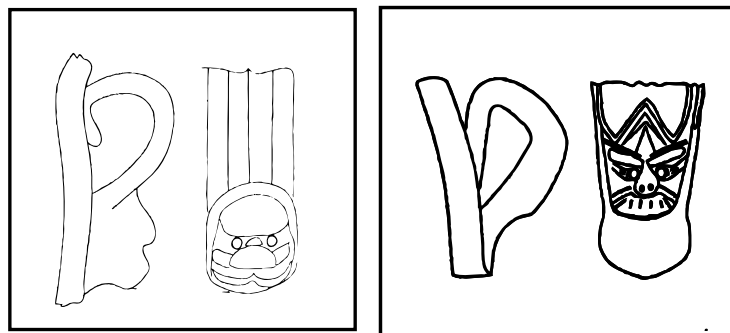


Figure 6

### Motif composition

Inside the motif decoration found on Iban pottery, each composition or the place of motives are concerned. It is not just a beautiful decoration. In Iban pottery, a large dragon motif must be placed in the middle between the top and bottom of the pottery. It is the main symbol of worship of the Iban. Meanwhile, it can be seen clearly the motif placement of the animals, plants, the stars, the moon and the sun is at the side of the dragon. They believe that this motif serves as a guardian and give food to the dragon.

If only the dragon motif is placed on pottery, there will be bad things happen. They believe the dragon will eat the owner so will cause death.

Thus, each motif on pottery must have cosmology that related with the universe so as to avoid unintended things. Iban highly believes in the existence of gods and goddess, the supernatural and spirit. To them this life is a teaching for them to continue to life in this world. If not follow bad thing will happen such as natural disasters, drought, and so on.

Based on informer, Ana Tugang Noria, she recounts at one point there was a cry tajau and can only be heard by a man. This guy has got a dream that the tajau turned into a human and asked to find for his missing partner. This guy has been trying to find another tajau that is the partner of the tajau he found. In the end, the tajau was successfully united and the guy has got well-being and harmony in life.

Based on the dreams, Iban believe that every living being in this world, have been paired. They balance each other. If it is single, unwanted things will happen. Hence, the Iban belief in each motif on the tajau must be paired. It can be seen clearly at each motif on the tajau that is used in the 'Adat Tusun Tunggu'. The motifs are not placed on the tajau, Iban believe the spirit of the dragon will be disturbed by evil spirits and will cause the death of the tajau owner.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is such a beautiful thought of the Iban cosmology. Each tajau has its own cosmology and complete each other. They believe the environment surrounded them will give happiness and harmony in their daily life's until it became custom inherited by their ancestors. However, now The Iban ways of life has changed according to the time changes. Even though changes occur; custom and culture must be emphasized as a result that the nowadays generation will know their history so it won't just disappear.

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