

# Formation of Community Character through Cultural Recollections in Ceramics: Insights from Dayaks in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Cultural recollections in ceramics has the potential in shaping character of people to maintain social harmony and responsibility while developing a caring attitude towards Nature. It is assumed that such potentials exist and manifest in collections of ceramics in Indonesia. In this context, this article examines the practice of cultural recollection in ceramics in the daily lives of the modern society in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This research addresses the question of how ceramics manifest, their functional practices, meanings, and character-building practices in cultural recollection within the Dayak community of West Kalimantan.

The study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data is gathered through field observations, interviews, and a literature survey. They examine types of ceramics such as *jampa*, *boko'o*, *balangkas*, and *kobok* which are utilized in cultural recollection activities. They uncover the ways in which the Dayak community imbues social values, rituals, healing mediums, and marriage, manifested in the form of ceramics as symbols of ancestral spirits.

The paper concludes that the impact of cultural recollection in ceramics leads the Dayak community to embody characteristics of empathy and responsibility towards fellow beings, Nature, and the environment, through social activities, culture, customs. This suggests that the understanding of cultural recollection in ceramics should continue to be developed and preserved, by both the government and the wider community. It proposes that the goal of cultural recollection in ceramics is integral in organizing a humane and character-driven social life.

**Keywords:** Function and meaning of ceramics, Ceramic cultural recollection, Dayak community character

## Introduction

Ceramics are cultural products that have come into being specifically within the Dayak community of West Kalimantan. In the daily lives of the Dayak people, ceramics hold functions and meanings deeply intertwined with their socio-cultural existence. The use of ceramics in Dayak customary ceremonies encompasses values, norms, ethics, beliefs, and laws, thereby solidifying these activities as integral aspects of their social identity (Triyanto, 2019; Oksanen *et al.*, 2023). This endows ceramics with significance, often considered sacred. Consequently, they have a profound impact on the community's life, contributing to the intergenerational formation of social character norms. Another impact lies in the community's perspective on preserving the natural environment and fostering harmony amidst diversity, achieved through Dayak customary ceremonies symbolized by the presence of ceramics. For the Dayak community, cultural recollection is imperative in preserving their cultural identity and shaping their character. Engaging in cultural recollection activities is a profound form of self-awareness for individuals and holds a great importance in building values and deriving meaning in life, leading from irrational to rational comprehension, influencing both individuals and groups (Posada *et al.*, 2020; Budharaju *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, cultural recollection activities related to the functions of ceramics and meanings have the potential to significantly contribute to shaping the character of the Dayak community.

The shift and lack of understanding regarding character education in this modern era has become a serious problem that makes some people lose their concern for cultural values in the formation of identity. This is different from the Dayak community group, which currently in carrying out its culture still adheres to the meaning contained in ceramics as character formation. The existence of cultural recollection activities is a way for the Dayak community to inherit the practice of character formation through the meaning of ceramics. Based on opinion Jensen *et al.*, (2023) cultural recollection is a way of reviewing and repeating past values related to life. This means that the process of cultural recollection is a system of inheritance, reviewing meaning, acceptance and emphasizing a high sense of ownership. This makes character formation through ceramics considered a strategy in solving the problems of modern world life.

Previous research on cultural recollection in relation to the meaning and function of ceramics has been extensive. However, there remains a lack of in-depth explorations regarding its role in character formation within the communities. In fact, earlier studies have not sufficiently demonstrated the connection between the community and ceramic art in shaping the character of the Dayak people.

There are three crucial aspects that emphasize the significance of cultural recollection activities involving Dayak ceramics in character formation. First, some studies emphasize the utilitarian function of ceramics (Liard, 2019), as well as the symbolic meaning found in the various decorations of ceramics (Triyanto, 2019; Casta *et al.*, 2021; Lambert, 2023). Second, there are several studies regarding the process of recollection through cultural acculturation and preservation in art objects (Miller, 2020; Montayev *et al.*, 2023; Triatmodjo *et al.*, 2023). Third, ceramics serve as markers of a community's identity in relation to its cultural values (Daniela *et al.*, 2023; Nova *et al.*, 2023; Pintossi, 2023; Wardekker, 2023).

Despite these three aspects concerning cultural recollection activities in the community through the function and meaning of ceramics, the focus still predominantly centers on daily utilitarian functions, decorative symbolism, cultural acculturation, and community group identity. This, however, has yet to be discussed in a scholarly study regarding the cultural recollection activities of the Dayak people through ceramic art in character formation.

This paper posits that engaging in cultural recollection through ceramics plays a significant role in shaping the character of the Dayak community, resulting in substantial social impacts. These impacts are manifested in the community's consensus in organizing social norms, underpinned by the meanings conveyed through ceramics. The existence of social norms within the community elevates ceramics to an object of art that become a visual language capable of influencing society. This understanding is inseparable from the mystical significance attributed to ceramics. The Dayak community employs the mysticism of ceramics as a means

of exerting control over individuals regarding breaches of social norms. This strategy is believed to be instrumental in shaping the identity and character of the Dayak community. Engaging in cultural recollection activities serves to foster awareness in preserving the environment and upholding inherited belief systems. Indeed, the cultural recollection activities involving ceramic art for the Dayak community serve to organize life based on social, cultural, and traditional values.

Therefore, the formation of character within the Dayak community necessitates the practice of cultural recollection, along with the embodiment of character in preserving the cultural values. This research aims to reveal and disseminate information related to the form, function, meaning of ceramics and strategies for character formation in cultural activities through the concepts of cultural recollection. This research complements the previous studies that have provided limited insight into the cultural recollection of ceramics and its impact on community character formation.

In this context, this study seeks to uncover the values, meanings, functions, and impacts associated with cultural recollections through ceramics in shaping the character of the Dayak community. This investigation revolves around three crucial questions addressing the research issues as follows.

- (1) What is the manifestation of ceramics as cultural recollection within the Dayak community?
- (2) What are the functions and meanings of ceramics in the practice of cultural recollection?
- (3) How does the character of the Dayak community manifest in the practice of cultural recollection?

These three key aspects of the study are essential in providing insights into the rationale behind the formation of Dayak community character through cultural recollection in ceramic art. Furthermore, it addresses another crucial aspect concerning successful life organization through adhering to social norms and conducting cultural recollection in ceramics.

## **Theoretical Basis**

### **Cultural Recollection of Ceramics**

Like other sacred objects, ceramics have the capacity to influence human thoughts and actions. When someone is near sacred ceramics, their behavior tends to be self-regulated. This aligns with the cultural significance that ceramics hold sacred elements for certain groups in Indonesia (Triyanto, 2019). However, this differs from the purpose of using art objects to remember the past and ancestral heritage without necessarily emphasizing their sacredness (Ting, 2017; Victoria *et al.*, 2017). The presence of art objects that are deeply interpreted serves as a form of recollection to revisit the object (Miniukovich, 2023). In line with cultural recollection as a review of the past, it brings about changes in individuals due to the depth of interpretation (Marini *et al.*, 2020). Another distinction lies in the cultural recollection of ceramics, which is carried out by communities for knowledge development, character formation, and religious beliefs (Sulistiyono, 2023). Based on these thoughts, cultural recollection through art, particularly ceramics, serves as a process of awareness in building values, norms, and character in social environments, through the practice of cultural recollection.

Cultural recollection establishes a paradigm in the context of cause and effect between people and their belief systems. This differs from the symbolic formation of environmental identity related to an area's icon through ceramic art forms (Subiyantoro, 2023). Another distinction lies in the symbolism found in ceramic art, serving as a creative means of communication to provide understanding of life for people (Liard, 2019). However, the importance of cultural recollection lies in transforming memory into an experience that can be narrated as knowledge (Ahmed, 2023). In line with constructing a paradigm, cultural recollection through the interpretation of ceramics in specific rituals constitutes a repetition and a review of past values and beliefs (Jacknis, 2019; Sulistiyono, 2023).

There is a similarity in the practice of cultural recollection through ceramic art in traditional rituals in various regions of Kalimantan, where the connection to ancestral spirits gives rise to interpretations considered sacred (Feslová *et al.*, 2023). The practice of cultural recollection through ceramics is a step towards building knowledge in the form of a paradigm that impacts society.

### **The Character of Dayak Community**

It is known that a significant portion of human character is shaped by their environment and culture. This aligns with the humanistic concept that conserves character through attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Timm, 2023). Another similarity is the humanistic approach in character formation, which occurs when delving into deep feelings and meanings (Sugiarto *et al.*, 2023). Another strategy in character formation through art, especially ceramics, lies in self-regulation when appreciating meanings that contain social norm values (Triyanto, 2019). In the humanistic approach to character formation, the practice of appreciating involves exploring the daily lives of the Dayak community (Murhaini, 2021; Adnyana *et al.*, 2023). There is a similarity in character formation through ceramic art in the Dayak community, where self-regulation in attitude, knowledge acquisition, insight, and building an egalitarian life environment are characteristic features of the community in constructing its identity (Triyanto, 2019; Casta *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, the formation of the character of the Dayak community can be done humanistically through the interpretation of art objects and noble values.

Indeed, preserving noble values is an integral part of human character. According to Subiyantoro, (2023), this serves as a strategy for cultural preservation. Another distinction lies in the preservation of ancestral values in constructing identity for the community (Pintossi, 2023). This previous statement differs from the concept of cultural values related to ancestral heritage in the practice of art, appreciation, and function, thereby forming characteristics of confidence, care, and honesty (Liard, 2019; Feslová *et al.*, 2023). However, there is a similarity in character formation through the meaning of art in applying the prevailing norms in several regions (Marini *et al.*, 2020). This aligns with the practices of the Dayak community in Kalimantan regarding the meaning of ceramic art as an embodiment of ancestral spirits, thus shaping the community character (Murhaini, 2021). Certainly, the values inherited from ancestors are an integral part of the Dayak community's behavioral portrait in life.

### **Review of Literature**

In various societies, it is widely acknowledged that ceramics are not only seen as functional objects, but also hold mystical values. This can be observed in belief systems that associate symbolic meanings with ceramic items, invariably linked to events in community life (Islam, 2020; Murhaini, 2021; Sulistyono, 2023). The strength of a community's belief system renders ceramics sacred objects, leading to distinct treatments compared to other items due to the strong mystical associations (Billur *et al.*, 2017; Semashyna, 2023). The function of ceramics imbued with mysticism gives rise to belief systems for humanity. This represents an outcome of mysticism, altering human thinking and generating knowledge (Triyanto, 2019; Posada *et al.*, 2020; Ahmed, 2023; Sulistyono, 2023). Therefore, understanding the mysticism of ceramics can serve as a force and awakening for individuals in their lives.

The awareness of human existence through the mystical values of ceramics serves to construct thought processes. This aligns with how people think about knowledge, social attitudes, and norms in their daily lives, influenced by mystical values (Jacknis, 2019; Naredia, 2023). Another mystical impact is that it instills a spiritual disposition in communities. This spiritual disposition is manifested through visual elements believed to bring individuals closer to the divine (Oksanen *et al.*, 2023; Sugiarto *et al.*, 2023). Parallel to the practice of ceramics containing mysticism in its visual elements, it generates rules in social life (Liard, 2019; Casta *et al.*, 2021). (Murhaini, 2021) believes that cultural recollection activities with the meaning of ceramics as a symbol of the ancestors of the Dayak community, contain mysticism and are able to impact changes in human character.

## Research Methods

This research focuses on ceramics utilized and imbued with meaning by the Dayak community in West Kalimantan during cultural recollection activities. The research locations include Landak, Sanggau, Kubu Raya, Bengkayang, Pontianak, Sambas, Sekadau, the city of Pontianak, and Singkawang. These areas were chosen due to their shared cultural practices. For the Dayak people, ceramics hold a significant and profound role as a symbol of ancestral presence in the traditional activities (Oktaviani, 2019).

Recollection activity	Ceramic type	Location
<i>Nyangahan</i>	<i>boko'o, balangkas</i>	Landak
<i>Gawai</i>	<i>Jampa, kobok, balangkas</i>	Sanggau
Wedding	<i>Boko'o, jampa, balangkas</i>	Bengkayang, Sekadau
Customary law	<i>Jampa, boko'o, balangkas</i>	Sambas, Kubu Raya
Traditional medicine	<i>Boko'o, balangkas, kobok</i>	Bengkayang, Landak
Custom <i>palantar</i>	<i>Boko'o balangkas, kobok</i>	Pontianak, Singkawang

**Fig. 1:** Cultural Recollection Activities and Types of Character Building Ceramics as sources of data collection by observation.

Source: Authors

The research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach, focusing on the meaning and function of ceramics as a symbol of ancestral presence in a spiritual sense during Dayak cultural recollection activities. The research object consists of ceramic artifacts, representing nobility, and the perspectives of the community in assigning value and applying these values in social life, thereby shaping the character of the Dayak community. To gain a profound understanding of this research case, the researcher physically attended the research location to interact with the community. There are several informants who are important points for researchers in obtaining data and types of data.

No	Informant	Data collection technique	Data type
1	Local government	Interviews, observations, field studies	Records, notes, photos
2	Cultural practitioner	Interviews, observations, field studies	Records, notes, photos
3	Traditional figures	Interviews, observations, field studies	Records, notes, photos
4	Owner of culture	Interviews, observations, field studies	Records, notes, photos
5	Ceramic artist	Interviews, observations, field studies	Records, notes, photos
6	Smart people (dukun)	Interviews, observations, field studies	Records, notes, photos

**Fig. 2:** Information about the informant

Source: Authors

The selection of informants was conducted meticulously by the researcher, aligning with the required data.

No	Kode Informan	Informan
1	PD1	Represented a local government official specializing in Dayak culture State Museum in Pontianak
2	PD2	Was the Head of the Culture Department of the Education Office in I District, and PD3 was the Village Chief of Antan Rayan.
3	PB1	Was a member of the Dayak Customary Council in Binua Bamayak,
4	PB2	Was a Dayak Cultural Observer in Sanggau District,
5	PB3	Was a Manager and Promoter of Dayak Culture in Ambawang Kubu Raya.
6	AA1	Was a Dayak Customary Elder in Binua Sakanis, Bamayak,
7	AA2	Was a Dayak Customary Elder in <i>Panyangahan</i> , and SN1 was a representative of a Dayak supernatural shop.
8	RB1	Was a leader in cultural recollection activities in Bengkayang



		District.
9	RB2	Was a leader in cultural recollection activities in Sekadau District.
10	PB3	Was a leader in cultural recollection activities in Sambas District.
11	PB4	Was a leader in cultural recollection activities in Landak District.
12	PS1	Was a Ceramic Artist from Singkawang.

**Fig. 3:** Informant coding





Source: Authors

Data was collected through observation and in-depth interviews. Observations were made during the process of cultural recollection activities related to the meaning and function of ceramics as a symbol of Dayak community heritage and its impact on shaping the character of the Dayak social community. Unstructured interviews were conducted while observing these cultural activities and paying attention to the Dayak community's social context regarding the ancestral spirit significance in ceramic form.

Data collection took place from March 2022 to June 2023. The data analysis process involved sorting and grouping data according to themes and field findings (Sugiarto *et al.*, 2023). After the data grouping process, the next step was to verify the consistency of field data to ensure its validity. Once the data's validity was established, it was then organized based on relevance and described as research findings. These findings were then formulated into a conclusion regarding the significance of cultural recollection in ceramics in shaping the character of the Dayak community in West Kalimantan.

## Findings and Discussion

### The ceramic forms with ancestral spirits

Image	Varian	Character building
	<i>Jampa</i> ceramic	This ceramic has the function of storing, has meaning in life and forms the character of the Dayak people so that they are thrifty, caring, disciplined and have high responsibility. So that in practice the Dayak people have strong characteristics and attitudes regarding their identity.
	<i>Boko'o</i> ceramic	This ceramic is used to store the bones and ashes of ancestral bodies. This ceramic gives meaning to the character of the Dayak community, to respect life between humans, nature and the ancestral world. So the character of appreciation is manifested by the type of ceramic in this picture.
	<i>Balangkas</i> ceramic	This ceramic has a powerful meaning in forming the character of the Dayak people. This character is in the form of togetherness, between family, community and ancestral spirits.
	<i>Kobok</i> ceramic	This ceramic symbolizes the dignity of the Dayak people, because this type of ceramic is the ultimate solution, when facing a critical situation (which cannot be resolved through deliberation). This type of ceramic brings out the character of the Dayak people, to maintain truth and justice in their social life.

**Fig. 4:** Types of ceramics commonly used in cultural recollection activities.

Source: Author

The research identified 10 types of ceramic artifacts within the guci category. Among these, three dominant types were selected. They share similarities in color, patterns, motifs, and size. In contrast, for plate and bowl ceramics, there is one type each, categorized as variants 1 to 4. Figure 4 shows the commonly used ceramics in cultural recollection activities.

The first variant, known as "*keramik jampa*", is large in size, with dimensions of 132 cm in height, 52 cm in body diameter, 24 cm in mouth diameter, 21 cm in base diameter, and 18 cm in height from shoulder to mouth. This ceramic type features a dark brown color, six prominent handles, and Chinese dragon ornaments that are raised on the surface, giving the impression of the dragon being in motion. Variant 2, referred to as "*keramik boko'o*", lacks decorative patterns and is light brown in glaze. It stands at 34 cm in height, with a body diameter of 25 cm, mouth diameter of 12 cm, base diameter of 8 cm, and a height of 4 cm from shoulder to mouth. Variant 3, the "*keramik balangkas*", falls into the plate category.

There are two images presented for this type. The upper image shows the original photograph, while the lower one provides a sketch of the plate's form along with its measurements. The plate has an outer diameter of 42 cm, a base diameter of 20 cm, a height of 14 cm, and a depth of 12 cm for the concave section. The ceramic surface is covered in a dull gray glaze, and features a stylized plant motif on the inner surface. Finally, the variant 4 is known as "*keramik kobok*", a bowl-type ceramic with a smooth surface both inside and out, devoid of decorative patterns. It is covered in a gray glaze, with an overall height of 8 cm, a concave depth of 7 cm, and a top diameter of 14 cm, with a base diameter of 4 cm. These ceramic variants hold great spiritual significance for the community, having been passed down through generations in the practice of cultural recollection.

The informant PB1 says

The ceramic items from China have greatly influenced the Dayak people in various aspects of life. Since ancient times, the Dayak ancestors believed that these ceramics held magical powers in the land of Kalimantan. When the Chinese people arrived, they brought ceramics such as plates, bowls, and jars as offerings to the Dayak leaders. These items, once possessed by the leaders or the ancestors of the Dayak people, were considered sacred and were used in the traditional customs and rituals of the Dayak community.

Interview, March 13, 2022

The sacredness that is believed to be inherent in ceramic items has been passed down through generations in the Dayak community. According to the informant PB3, there is a mystical element associated with ceramic jars. These jars are believed to have a connection to natural disasters, illnesses, and other life problems. If someone behaves improperly in the community, one of the solutions to avoid misfortune is to conduct the Dayak traditional ritual known as '*nyagahan*' (interview, August, 2022). Another informant, RB1, mentioned that besides the visible signs of the mystical impact of ceramic jars, the Dayak people associate dreams of encounters with ancestral spirits resembling the serpent/dragon motifs on the jars. It's as if there is communication related to life, such as prohibitions against indiscriminate tree felling, opening fields, selling inherited ceramic jars, and uttering impolite words at home or in the community (interview, April 28, 2022). Informant PB3 stated that the understanding of the sacredness of ceramic jars gives meaning to life. Therefore, ceramic jars are considered as *buah tengah* (the embodiment of both human and ancestral spirits). Someday, the ceramic jar will merge with the body and become a place of consideration for life towards the *kayangan* (heaven) (interview, June 4, 2022).

The opinion expressed by PB2 is that, within the family, the ceramic jar serves as a guide and witness for a couple who have grown up and embarked on the journey of married life. It is as if the souls of the husband and wife are united and entered into a new home, namely the ceramic jar. Therefore, it must be cared for and preserved so that family life remains eternal until death (interview, September 10, 2022). The phenomenon experienced by the community has made ceramic jars, specifically the guci type, a believed element due to its mystical power, as conveyed during the interview with (AA1);

*“Ngkami tapayan ari sana madi ka'nak ku nag bini, di ngalap buah mimpi, padara ama ku kaliya nyaruba ka tapayan na, ngkat kaluar ular na ka dalamp tapayant na, sanjati aya, saga dah kadatang kamuda ku sanjati galensah kangatan kaeng kampak, dah barape kali kami mabay aka rumah sakit malar dokter madah na ba panyakit, pega kami maba tapayan na minta bere pakan, ntah mpape ari sana ngkat kaluar api ijo, menah ular dari tama ka dalamp lubakg tanah, mpitu ari masih di miara tapayant na.*

“The ceramic jar we possess, a type of 'tempayan', caused my daughter to become seriously ill, with her body becoming hot during the onset of the illness. According to the doctor, no specific illness was found in my daughter. When we received guidance through a dream that there was a large serpent inside the 'tempayan', which was the manifestation of my late father's spirit, we finally conducted a traditional ritual of offering food to the jar in a spiritual manner. During this ritual, green-colored flames emerged and writhed like a serpent before entering the ground. Currently, we continue to care for the ceramic jar through these rituals”.

Interview, September 19, 2022

Based on the statements from PD3, ceramic types in variants 3 and 4, which are plates and bowls, serve as evidence and a symbol of apology to ancestors and the community for any transgressions (interview, December 3, 2022). According to the informant PD2, ceramic plates and bowls are symbolic items representing the rules of life. They are typically used as vessels for offerings during Dayak traditional ceremonies to ensure the offerings are accepted by Jubata (interview, January 6, 2023). According to information from the informant RB4, the profound meaning attributed to ceramic types in variants 3 and 4 creates a deep-seated belief, associating them as symbols of human organs - ceramic plates represent heart, while ceramic bowls symbolize the heart (interview, October 11, 2022).

Informant AA2 mentions that the mystic understanding of ceramics is tied to an age-old belief, frequently manifested in Dayak traditional rituals like "*nyangahan*," customary law, and markers of human connection with ancestral spirits (*kamang*) (interview, February 16, 2023). According to the informant PD1, the significance attached to ceramics has led the Dayak people in Kalimantan to consider them as heirlooms. Typically, these ceramic items are stored in specific places and are only brought out when needed for ceremonial purposes (interview, November 19, 2022).

The quantity of ceramic items like plates, bowls, and jars is produced daily by ceramic artisans in Singkawang. As PS1 says, the selling process for ceramics has not encountered any difficulties up to now, as there continues to be a high demand from the Dayak community, prompting their continuous production every day (interview, April 18, 2023).

The understanding of the sacredness of ceramics represents a profound awareness related to life. This indicates that ceramics are a form of art that influences people. Ceramics are aesthetic objects that impact meaning and can convey information (Jacknis, 2019). When people are able to delve into the deepest meaning of ceramics, particularly in terms of visual elements, they will discover an information system within themselves consciously. The process of realizing a meaning is carried out through the subjective response of people (Williams, 2019).

The profound response of people regarding the meaning of ceramics demonstrates that mystical culture plays a role in shaping a new soul. This is inseparable from the power of interpreting the presence of past values, which are considered to have a spirit in the form of ceramics, in order to create a new grammar (Lambert, 2023). It can be said that ceramics that carry profound meaning will be the most significant evidence of the existence of spiritual power and will provide aesthetic value through new languages of meaning.

The meaning within ceramics embodies a sacred form of communication. This designates ceramics as an art form that contributes to constructing a mystical understanding. In



life, thoughts regarding the mystics serve as a means of self-preservation to enhance experiences deemed lacking, and to hold beliefs in a different manner (Semashyna, 2023). The power of human experience establishes ceramics as an art form intertwined with human existence. Thus, the spirit of ceramic art meaning is a part of life's significance (Han *et al.*, 2023). Speaking of life, ceramics represent both the sensation and the creative process in constructing the aesthetics of life. The presence of ceramic art in human life fosters creativity in connection to meaningful renewal through interpretation (Martin, 2023; Sánchez, 2023). Everyone will invariably seek a renewed meaning within ceramics that carries mystical elements. This is the human body's way of thinking creatively to imbue ceramics as ancestral spirits subjectively.

### Cultural Recollection as a Religious Practice

		
Activity : 1 Ceramics in Nyangahan Ceremony (the activity of praying to ancestral spirits)	Activity : 2 Ceramics in Dayak Gawai Ceremony (harvest feast)	Activity : 3 Ceramics in Dayak Traditional Wedding
		
Activity : 4 Ceramics in Dayak Customary Law Activities	Activity : 5 Ceramics in the Healing Rituals for the Ill ( <i>babore</i> ).	Activity : 6 ceramics in palantar <i>nabo padagi</i> ceremony

**Fig. 5:** Function of Ceramics in the Cultural Recollection Practices

Source: Author

Figure 5 depicts six cultural activities in the community related to the function and significance of ceramics, and these activities are commonly found in the social sphere of the Dayak society. Activity 1 encompasses all activities 2-6, as the "nyangahan" ceremony involves the recitation of mantras performed by a customary figure (*panyangahan*) believed to have the ability to communicate with ancestors. According to the informant (PB3), the *panyangahan*'s ability to summon the *kamang* spirit is aimed at keeping humans away from all kinds of dangers in life, and ceramics such as jars, plates, and bowls serve as a form of redemption from impending disasters before they befall humans (interview on June 20, 2023). In the practice of "*nyangahan*," there is a mystical impression built around the visual form of ceramics. Blood from chickens, pigs, and dogs is applied to the jars, plates, and bowls. Then, the *panyangahan* puts in rice, both cooked and raw chicken meat, chicken feathers, salt, and stirs them with the blood on the ceramics.

It is thrown as if this process is providing sustenance to the *kamang* spirit, all the while reciting mantras. After the recitation of mantras, the *panyangahan* will stop reciting and establish rules not to lift or move the ceramics because the ancestral spirits are in the process of eating and entering the jars, as conveyed by the informant (RB3), "*pea dulu tapayan na' dah laka di nyangahan, mere'e makan antu nagtua, na agi ngaco urakg nag sampanan ngalintas dia agi, tiga ari tiga malam lah ya ngia boh jang*" (leave the jar that has been recited with mantras untouched during the "*nyangahan*," let the ancestors eat, let them go about their activities, for three days and three nights, so they won't disturb people in their daily lives, interview on November 27, 2022).

Here is the *panyangahan* mantra provided by the informant (AA2):

*“asa, dua, talu, ampat, lima, anam, tujuh....ao.....pama jubata ai tanah jubata kami agi atakg ka’ kita jubata, timawang jubata, pantak jubata....pantak padagi jubata, nag pane nag ngarati ka adat anak ucu’ kita’a laka batak ka ba ke’eh katanah nian, kami agi ngicang adat ka kita talu tail babi dua, biar ame ba tampak, ba’ badi ba’ idap ka sengat, ka badan, ka tubuh, ka rumah, ka tanga’a, ka kampong, ka tumpuk ka binua, nagari anak ucu kita’a. dah muat atur muat adat ka’ene ka’kita pama jubata urang tuha ia uga supaya ame ba’badi na ba,idap, nag niam ia ka tubuh, badan ka’rumah ka’tanga ka kampong, ka radakg, ia nag ba ke’eh. atur muat adat kasalahan ka jangkol ka tinyak, ka saka, ka tutur ian tampaknya agi ngaramknya supaya ame ba’badi ba’ijap ka badan ka tubuh ka tanga ka kampong ka tumpuk ka nagari agi minta sama ringakng, sama nyaman muat adat muat atur agi ka tanah nag di make’ehan nian ba badi ba idap anak ucu kita’a agi ba’tampak ba’tarang, muat atur muat adat ka kita’a. munuh manok, munuh babi ka’ bibis tabakg, balah jarami Ne’Sesep agi pama jubata...”*

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven O Almighty Creator, owner of this homeland, we come before you again, O Lord, village Lord, land Lord, Lord of all, who knows and understands the customs of your descendants, that in the past they fought and quarreled in this place. We come to you bearing customs to be presented, "talun tail babi dua", so that no evil event will befall us, the breath of our lives, our bodies, our entire household, our village, and this entire region, wherever your descendants may be. We have established rules and customs for you, O Lord, the Creator, so that no disaster will befall us, our family environment, all those in our home, the people in our village, and our entire region. We ask for your health, protection, and physical as well as spiritual well-being, and no more quarreling or fighting. Rules and customs have been made for you, we slaughter chickens, we slaughter pigs, *ka’bibis tabakg, balah jarami in the land of Ne’Sesep’s descendants...* establishing customs and seeking your protection, O Lord”

Recording taken on April 2, 2023

After the completion of the "nyangahan" ceremony, there are cultural activities in the community depicted in figures 2, 3, and 4, including the "gamai" ceremony, traditional weddings, and the application of customary law. All three activities utilize ceramics as a central element of the cultural event. The "gawai" ceremony takes place after the harvest season, serving as a form of gratitude for the Dayak people towards the Almighty (jubata). In this cultural activity, the community enjoys themselves, symbolizing unity, regardless of social status, education, religion, or race. This is symbolized by drinking "tuak" together, which is served in jars. According to informant RB3, another cultural activity is the Dayak traditional wedding, where ceramics symbolize the voice of both sides of the union and are interpreted as artifacts that bear witness to the marriage recorded in customary administration in the form of ceramics. This can be further used for civil registry administration through a recommendation from the Dayak customary council (interview on May 22, 2023). The Dayak customary council also plays a role in the establishment of Dayak customary law, related to violations of societal norms. Ceramics like plates and jars hold specific values corresponding to the level of offense. Informant RB2 stated that the smallest offenses usually involve an apology and the giving of a sanction, like "sa’singkap pingan manok seko" which means one chicken for one plate. Ceramic plates are considered a form of apology where someone acknowledges their mistake and promises not to repeat it (interview on April 30, 2023). According to informant PB2, ceramic jars in customary sanctions are often referred to as "tail", and the number of "tail" will be adjusted according to the severity of the offense. Payment for customary sanctions will be made with ceramic jars, as they are seen as a symbol of the human body that has suffered harm and

is compensated with a body resembling the shape of a ceramic jar (interview on August 23, 2022).

The implicit meanings of ceramics for the Dayak community are pivotal in cultural activities. One such example can be seen in figure 3, activity 5, where ceramics are used as a medium for healing. As stated by informant SN1, in this traditional healing activity, ceramic jars, bowls, and plates are filled with clean water, and mantras are recited while seeking guidance from the ceramic objects. The patient is then bathed by sprinkling flowers and drinking water that has been recited with mantras, which is kept in the jar to be consumed over the next few days (interview on November 2, 2022). The Dayak community believes that ceramic jars have the ability to heal the sick, as the spirit of the afflicted person moves away from their body and enters the jar. By drinking water that has been recited with mantras, healing can be achieved. In addition to its function as a healing tool, ceramics are also used in the customary "ngawah" ceremony to determine a location for opening fields in the forest. The ceramics planted serve as a symbol of seeking permission from ancestral spirits, wild animals, and creatures considered pests to not disturb humans while they clear the land and not harm the plants in the field. Ceramic jars are recited with "nyangahan" mantras first, then placed in the ground with spoken words, conveying messages to the ceramics to care for and protect the field and its contents. Here is the message conveyed by informant RB4 while speaking to the ceramic jar.

*“ nian aku ba patak ka kita, muat atur, minta banto, di tele koa uma kami, ame sampe ada nag ngaco, baho ngaramuk, ngosa ahe nag kami tanam, edo buah nya, asilnya banyak, kami dah mare ungu ka tapayan, tompo ka kita urangk nag dah nana ka dania nian, kajah-kajah ka ukunya, nian nu kita nag nunggu nya, nian nu kami uma, asilnya ka kami uga”*

“This is a human request, we have established rules and seek assistance in safeguarding our fields, so that they are not disturbed by pests that harm the crops, ensuring abundant yields from our hard work. We have allocated a portion to the troublesome spirits of the plants in the form of jars. We are the owners of this field, and its produce is for us”

Interview on April 6, 2023

The occurrence of creative thinking in humans when interpreting ceramics is closely tied to human cognitive awareness. This section represents a religious contemplation regarding cultural reverence for the significance of ceramics. This renders ceramics as objects that serve a purpose in life. The sacred artistic function of ceramics has a cognitive impact on humans, forming the basis for religious practices in life (Jacknis, 2019; Savić, 2023). Religious activities stem from cultural contemplation that arises from creative thinking in perceiving ceramics. This process is rooted in human memory, which then transforms into language and communication related to the function of ceramics. Hence, this approach embodies a religious essence (Liard, 2019; Jensen *et al.*, 2023; Savić, 2023). The practice of religion in relation to the function of ceramics is carried out by communities in their daily lives, and ceramics with their religious essence have become an integral part of this practice. Through the activities of contemplation related to the function of ceramics, a culture is formed, and in carrying out daily life, it becomes a religious practice grounded in creative thinking.

Religious individuals are inherently creative beings. This aligns with religious practices, involving the acceptance and exploration of modalities related to ceramics imbued with mysticism (Jones, 2017). Engaging in religious practices through ceramics serves as a symbolic arrangement for daily life. This practice reflects how humans enact their religious beliefs, with the understanding that in the container of ceramics, humans find a part of their spirituality that complements them (Miller, 2020). Ceramics, as integral elements of life's symbols, touch upon the cultural fabric in the practice of religion. The practice of using ceramics in religious contexts is rooted in the need for imitation and the necessity of revisiting, reinforcing the awareness of ceramics' function as a communicative aspect of life (Nam, 2020). Religious practices, where

individuals care for and possess ceramics while emulating meanings from the past, bestow strength upon ceramics. This strength lies in their ability to evoke values from the past, linked to awareness and the pursuit of life as a part of religious activities for humans.

### The characteristics of Dayak community in cultural recollection practice



**Fig. 6:** Outcomes of the Dayak Community's Cultural recollection Practices

Source: Author

The Figure 6 illustrates the activities related to the characteristics of the Dayak community in their cultural reminiscence practices. Ceramics serve as symbols that imbue meaning and strength in social interactions within the Dayak community. There are three pieces of evidence that constitute the character traits commonly observed in the social environment of the Dayak community.

Evidence 1 exemplifies the Dayak community's openness to others, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, social status, or educational background. This is demonstrated through their practice of hosting and considering anyone who comes to their home or village as part of their extended family. The sense of familial ties and kinship is affirmed through gatherings where *tuak* (a traditional drink) is served without coercion. Alternatively, people simply sit together in a circle facing ceramics, engaging in conversations. Communication activities undertaken by the Dayak community, particularly between hosts and guests, are seen as establishing a sense of familial belonging or kinship. Ceramics are regarded as symbols that bind them together. As informant RB1 says “the process of establishing brotherhood and kinship cannot be separated from social life. Therefore, the sense of mutual aid and responsibility has become an integral part of their interactions. In times of adversity or disaster, the sense of brotherhood is still evident, and this is confirmed by the ceramics that bear witness to their initial meeting and communication” (interview on January 22, 2023).

Evidence 2 underscores the importance of conducting a ritual rooted in the Dayak tribe's traditional belief system to maintain relationships among humans, nature, and the Creator. The Dayak community's belief system is consistently symbolized by the ritual of summoning ancestral spirits, wherein ceramics serve as a medium to bring the community closer to these spirits. The communication between the community and ancestral spirits is represented by the *panyagahan*, the individual who recites the mantras. In this process, prayers are offered, seeking harmony among the village residents and an absence of deceit or harm in their behavior. As stated by informant (AA2), the *panyagahan* prays for the people in the village and for nature to bestow blessings in their pursuit of livelihoods, as well as to be shielded from harm and illness. It is believed that the ancestral spirits hear the calls of the *panyagahan* through their symbolic representation in ceramics, plates, bowls, and jars (interview on April 2, 2023). In Dayak social life, praying for one another is a deeply ingrained characteristic passed down through generations. This religious practice involving communication with ancestors continues to be observed, fostering a peaceful and harmonious community.

The establishment of harmonious relationships within the Dayak community in West Kalimantan is evident in Evidence 3, concerning the formation of the Dayak customary council involving the government. The management of the Dayak customary legal institution is carried out to create regulations regarding violations of social norms. As stated by informant (AA1),



within these regulations, ceramics such as plates, bowls, and jars serve as symbols of customary penalty payment for transgressors (interview on September 19, 2022). The selection of these ceramic items has been passed down through generations and continues to be practiced. For the Dayak community, ceramics represent a symbol (*buah tangah*) of ancestral spirits or the representation of the people's voice in administering customary legal penalties. With the practice of customary law, the Dayak society pays great attention to the rules established for their actions within the community. Thus, the values of harmony arise from the adherence to these customary legal regulations.

Society possesses a distinct identity and a way to interpret ceramics in relation to life. This process is inseparable from the assimilation of humans with their environment, giving rise to a reflection of an awareness of art objects in organizing life and the surroundings (Timm, 2023). Ceramics, carrying meaning and noble values, have an impact on the way of life in society. There is a commonality in several societal groups where ceramics, considered sacred, have the ability to influence social life through the cultivation of values of compassion towards fellow humans, regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, and educational status (Triyanto, 2019; Nurhayati, 2020; Triatmodjo *et al.*, 2022). The social impact that occurs in interpreting mystical ceramics serves as a means of communication to shape individual human personalities. This individuality becomes an action in controlling life and generating new information about values and culture, which is then put into practice in the surrounding environment (Marini *et al.*, 2020; Boysen *et al.*, 2023). The power of ceramic meanings in controlling life is a unique pleasure for humans. This impact thereby creates new values and culture in characterizing a person's relationship with their environment.

In human life, differences in responding to ceramics with mystical elements are often encountered. The choices made when responding to ceramic art objects are influenced by past experiences or inherited communication. This aligns with the forms of ceramics that can provide an insight into past values and influence the behavior of cultural groups in society (Arkanudin, 2021; Murhaini, 2021; Timm, 2023). Unearthing the values of the past through ceramic art forms has the ability to shape personalities and ultimately become a part of one's identity. At this stage, individuals will exercise emotional control and innovation in the process of exploring the meaning of the past (Montayev *et al.*, 2023; Valdés, 2023). The visual language of ceramics becomes a component in the self-control process related to reminiscing about past values. Thus, with the awareness that forms a part of the decision-making process derived from the meaning of ceramics in the past, it becomes an action in social life (Miller, 2020; Ahmed, 2023). The values of the past related to the meaning of ceramics can be rediscovered through the cultural recollection process. Therefore, the power of character formation based on the symbolic meaning of ceramics has the ability to inspire individuals in their behavior within their social environment.

## Conclusions

The most significant findings of this research include the cultural recollection process related to the sacred meaning of ceramics in the Dayak traditional ceremonies. There are several Dayak traditional ceremonies, ranging from birth, law, harvest thanksgiving (*naik dango*), marriage customs (*balaki babini*), healing the sick, and funeral rites. In the cultural activities conducted by the community, there is an opportunity to interact with family, local communities, and outsiders, to collectively learn about social norms, customary values related to life, as conveyed by the Dayak customary leaders.

Ceramics considered sacred by the Dayak community symbolize togetherness, in sharing *tuak* (traditional alcoholic beverage), serving as a bond of brotherhood regardless of social status, education, religion, race, or ethnicity. This has been passed down through generations, instilling an understanding that everything in the world is interconnected and unified in the form of flesh, nature, and spirit. This principle is what makes the Dayak community in West Kalimantan have a strong sense of unity and solidarity, as well as a high level of care for one another, nature, and culture.



*Jampa, balangkas, bo'ko* and *kobok* ceramics are ceramics that can shape the character of the Dayak people. The character produced through the meaning of ceramics is in the form of responsibility, discipline, religion and high solidarity. These character values are often applied in everyday life in carrying out Dayak cultural customs and traditions, with the function of ceramics as a powerful character symbol in building the identity of the Dayak community group. Identity in character formation can be found in ceramics as a symbol of the *nyangahan* ceremony (praying to ancestral spirits), *gawai* (harvest feast), weddings, customary law, traditional medicine, and *nabo padagi* (ceremony for abundant harvest). An understanding of the meaning of ceramics, which is able to shape the character of the Dayak people, will always be found today. This is a culture that has been passed down from generation to generation, so that its existence is increasingly maintained.

This research provides a valuable scholarly contribution and complements existing studies in the field of ceramic art and culture. Previous research on ceramics, particularly in relation to cultural value, has been relatively shallow, often focusing solely on functional aspects without delving into the deeper meanings associated with cultural activities in shaping societal character. This knowledge can serve as a learning tool for formal, non-formal, and informal education settings, aiding in the development of social attitudes within communities. Cultural stakeholders can preserve and engage in broader collaborations with cultural enthusiasts, government bodies, and private sectors in understanding the significance of ceramics, ensuring it is passed on appropriately to future generations in line with the changing times. This will form a cohesive effort in preserving the noble values that shape our diverse society. If further research is conducted in the development of culture regarding the meaning of ceramics, it could have a broader social impact, both in shaping diversity of character and in cultural preservation. Therefore, there is a need for additional research to map out strategies for collaborative cultural advancement, particularly in the aspect of character formation through the profound cultural meanings of the Dayak community as embodied in ceramics.

This research still encounters limitations concerning variables and informants. It primarily focuses on the aspect of meaning attributed to ceramics within the Dayak community, emphasizing a belief system regarding cultural values. There are still other variables in the interpretation of ceramics that relate to a politicization system for cultural leaders within the community. This serves as a strategy in building trust among the community in assigning deeper meanings to ceramics, associated with noble values. Without the successful practice of this politicization, the significance of ceramics for the Dayak community would cease to exist, and the values related to unity and solidarity would be lost. Therefore, further research is still needed regarding the politicization strategies of meaning and sacredness attributed to ceramics practiced by the Dayak community.

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