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## Ceramic: Traditional to Modern

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### ABSTRACT

Pottery ceramics that we see in our everyday life are made of clay. They are simple wares that are still used by some of Javanese traditional people and people who live in the surrounding areas. Kendi is a kind of earthen ware to traditionally contain fresh water, while kendil is traditionally used to contain the placenta of the newly born babies. Another traditional earthen ware is ampo which is used by the pregnant women who are in severe pregnancy-related sickness. Still another, we have what we call kreweng which is used as the substitute for money and is traditionally used to buy dawet (a kind of traditional drink) in Javanese traditional wedding ceremonies. Although modernization has taken place, some people still utilize the traditional wares.

Earthen ceramic is very plastic that nearly any form can be shaped for different functions and purposes ranging from simple wares to complicated ones. In spite of the modernization, those seemingly simple pottery ceramics remain exist in some important ritual moments such as birth, wedding, funeral, and some other impressive events.

The making of ceramic requires good perseverance and seriousness in order to result in the ceramics with the expected functions and purposes, from simple purposes to functional purposes as food container, sanitary, and modern tiles. The responsive nature of the clay has become a medium for excellent visual art.

Keywords: ceramic, simple, ritual, tradition, modern, art.

### 1. Background

Indonesian people has long time recognized the importance of earthen ceramics. Particularly in Java, mother who has delivered a baby will need a container to put the placenta coming out with the fetus. The container traditionally called a *kendhil* is always made nothing else but clay. We all know that until now, *kendhil* is still used in traditional and customary moments. The use of traditional *kendhil* for traditional purposes has historically rooted in the ancient period.

Another traditional earthen container is *kendhil* (a traditional water jug).



Figure.1

A Father is carrying a *kendil* in which the fetus placenta has been put that will be buried in the ground.

Photo by: Noor.s



Figure.2

Type of earthen *kendhi* to keep the drinking water fresh and cool.

This earthen ware serves like a water cooler that keeps water fresh and cool. The boiled water is put into the jug and left for hours or a day to result a fresh and cool drinking water. In modern life *kendhi* is replaced by what we have known as water dispenser, which has been widely used in the society.

Such replacement also occurs in the practice of rice cooking. While in the past, rice was cooked in traditional rice-cooking *dandang* and *kuali*, modern societies prefer magic jar whose design is good and practical. With a single connection from the rice cooker to the electricity plug, we can cook various types of foods: two or three at once. While in the past women might cook simple food in longer hours, presently women may use electric-efficient and quick based cooking wares. In spite of the introduction of these industrial electric-based products, our humanistic sense and policy will return our valuable culture through the reintroduction of traditional values at all lines.



Picture.3

Some type of traditional kitchen wares are still in particular rural kitchen.

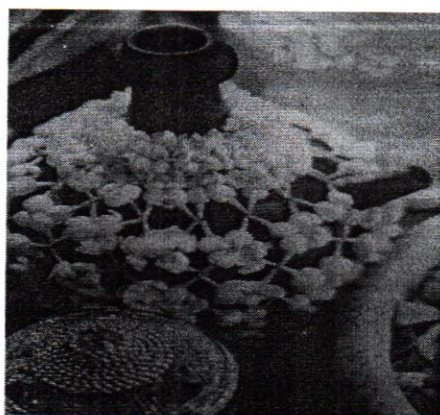


Figure.4

A *kendhi* decorated with jasmine flower used in *siraman* (symbolic bathing in wedding ceremony) of traditional Javanese wedding.





Figure.5

Traditional drinking jugs and cups traditionally used in tea drink.

The efforts and policies made by some local governments in preserving traditional and local culture have signified that traditional practices are more meaningful. They provide spiritual nature for our life. Although gradually, the reintroduction of traditional values has been going on to reinvent the ancient values in this country. Some events and programs have been to arrange to refresh the inherently embedded cultural values. Some ceremonies have presented traditional values and required traditional properties such as traditional potteries in ritualistic offering or sacrifice. Other types of potteries are currently used for traditional ritual purposes.

Another traditionally-used earthen ware is *kreweng*. *Kreweng* is a traditional substitute for the modern money. *Kreweng* is used in traditionally symbolic buying of *dawet* in traditionally Solo-type wedding ceremony. Nothing else has replace this war in such a traditional ceremony.

*Kreweng* is always made from clay. It will be inappropriate when such this traditional *kreweng* is made from other material such as: wood, metal, gold, or real coins. The writer has never found any *kreweng* made from materials other than clay in wedding ceremonies. This implies a very significant meaning of the use of clay in traditional ritual such as birth, wedding, and death. The existence of traditional ceramics in human's life is very important.



Figure. 6

Some coin-like earthen *kreweng* (substitute for money) made of the burn clay.



Figure. 7

*Kreweng* in the traditional practice of *dawet* buying in traditional Javanese wedding ceremonies.

The earth- colored *kreweng* used in traditional wedding ceremonies is intentionally produced with biscuit-technique to reserve the original material of clay. Therefore, the image of clay is preserved in object to represent values. The traditional events are sacral and have emotional sense for those involved in the events, particularly in Javanese culture



who strongly still adopts ancient practices.



Figure.8

Two pieces of *kreweng* with the initial of the married couple on them.

In addition to symbolic purposes, earthen ware also serve functional purposes and are widely used in households. They are used to keep drinking water and rice cooking. Another unusual ware is *ampo* which is purely clay. The clay is sliced into pieces and dried for consumption. This is practice by same people, particularly in Tuban whose community practice this. (pic. 9).In many villages in Java *ampo* is eaten by pregnancies women who suffer from morning sickness. They eat *ampo* to heal the nausea. This practice has rooted in the long ancient time and has been practiced over the generation in the society. By eating *ampo*, the women can satisfy their unusual appetite to be met.



Figure. 9

*Ampo* deriving from the sliced clay.

*Ampo* is sold in some traditional market in Yogyakarta Special Region and the greater areas. This is particularly intended to satisfy the unusual appetite related to pregnancy. They need for *ampo* among pregnant women is very interesting for further study and analysis. There has been relatedness between humans and the earth on which they live.



Figure. 10

Stick-shaped *ampo* made from dark clay.

Unburned clay in form of thin stick like rolls result from the sliced clay. The look like wafer biscuits and are consumed by pregnant women with unusual appetite. They are merely sold in traditional markets rather than in odern shops or store.



## 2. Closeness of Humans and Ceramics

When did for the first time we hold our ceramic plate? Hardly anybody can remember for sure. We even do not care much about such sanitary equipment as washbasin, closet, floor tile, wall tile, and bathroom tile. We do not care much about how they are produced. Lay people will never be bothered by such objects. Only the people who life in the simple civilization will care about it.

Nearly all regions have their unique ceramics related to tradition. In Kalimantan tempayan is sacret since they are inherited over generations and have to be appropriately and adequately cared and respected. Some magical stories tell that same tempayan can make a sound, and some others can move themselves from the initial position. The sacred tempayan with long

Existence and sacredness are collected by some collectors who have high appreciation to ancient ceramics. Some others are kept at museums (13-15 Adyatman, 1997).

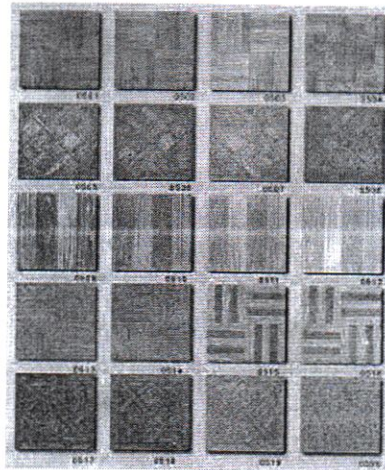


Figure.11  
Type of ceramic tile

We should appreciate the great benefits of such traditional objects such as kreweng, ampo, kendhil, kendhi, and luweng, in human rituals. Some of the ceramics object are developed into esthetic objects. In visual art they are developed into a contemplation media of particular civilization to be presented in an installation art. Therefore, currently there is an esthetic shift of the exiting traditional objects. The changes include the meaningfulness; from traditional objects to post-modern and contemporary arts. Functional changes of ceramics can be found in ceramic art exhibitions. On the one hand, modern ceramics are produced machines and technology. With complicated work process some types of tile can be produced. They are all significant in helping human activities.

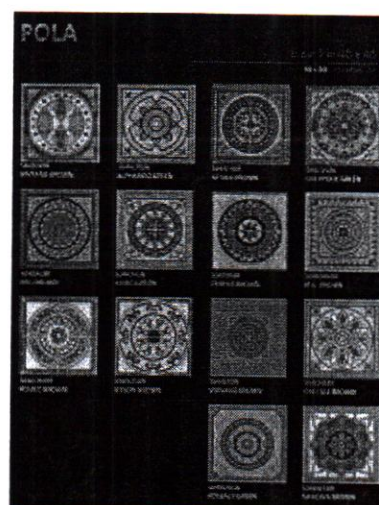


Figure. 12  
Type of design and pattern in modern ceramic tile

Ceramic objects always keep up with human civilization development. Ceramics are able to meet the very complex human needs. Lost historical facts can be traced back though the artifact of ceramics. Data on time, geography, and culture can be obtained.



Basically, ceramics were initially made by humans with simple technique. Such object as *cuwo*, bowl, plate, *layah*, (spice pounder), and cup were developed in simple way just like other house wares. They were handmade, burned in simple way with simple burning material of dried firewood and leaves put in the earth hole to make the objects hardened (Rhodes: 1981: 4). Later, traditional ceramics were developed. Such objects as *cobek*, *anglo*, *layah*, *wajan*, *kuali*, *gentong*, and *tempayan* were made with rotating technique and special indoor burning.

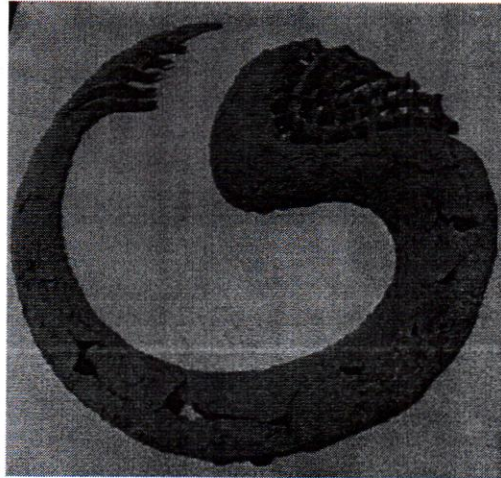


Figure.13  
Ceramic as media of visual art, by Noor Sudiyati. Yogyakarta Indonesia.

In recent time, floor tiles, cups, plate, offering objects, sanitary equipment, dinner set, and other human daily tools were developed. In line with the modernization, clay material were developed into ware house ware ceramics. They are esthetically excellent in color, shape, ornament, style, and image. (Hopper: 1986, 179).



Figure. 14  
Decorative ceramic with hand building technique by: Noor Sudiyati. Yogyakarta. Indonesia.

Functional ceramics for containers were also developed. Until now, ceramic world has been developed by visual artists and designers into visual arts or esthetic object for interior decoration of hotels and buildings. This type of ceramic is rich of metaphor the material of which cannot be substituted by other materials. They are potential and disclose meaningful to express creativity. Creative metaphor is a medium intended to express ideas or feeling in particular context in order that audience may disclose and understand the meaning (Guntur: 2014. 5).

The fundamental reason of why ceramics are now challenging and prospective media in art development is because of its excellent material. The plastic nature which is responsive to esthetic treatment of an artist enlarges the probability to have different shapes and realization. With adequate knowledge of clay formation, the clay will turn into esthetic media to express the affection of the artist and to be executed in a meaningful and symbolic art work. Ceramic are able to shape themselves without having to imitate any shape. When appropriate, ceramic shapes can be explored until the end of the imagination limit.

Ceramic objects play meaningful roles in traditional events such as in birth, wedding, and pregnancy. The events are inherently embedded in human life. When a baby is born, a ceramic *kendhil* is needed to put the placenta. When a person gets married, he need *kreweng* to buy dawet. Likewise, a pregnant women need earth-taste ampo



to be chewed. In funeral ceremonies, the corpse need a kendhi for water container in the funeral ground. The ash of the cremated dead body is put in the earthen container. The needed ceramics are not glazed yet or classified into traditional and simple ceramics.

### 3. Ceramics, the Objects Closest to Humans

In particularly important event of human life, ceramics are always present. This earthen ceramic are then glazed and finished with particularly modern and contemporary techniques. Since early morning people routinely

Need breakfast using a set of dining set. In bathroom we have sanitary equipment such as washbasin, closet, soap and shampoo holder, and ceramic walls. They are all glaze ceramics.

The many ceramics used by humans imply that ceramics are very close to our life. We use, clean, and keep them for daily use. In visual art ceramics have been perfected. The materials can become media of expression for visual artists and art student. New ideas can be developed through the material. The material allow us to have affection and excitement that are expressed spontaneously. The plastic nature of the clay enables it to be shape in any form. The clay indeed is alive. (Widayanto in Watie Murani: 2014).

A shape that an artist wants to have has to be executed into a realized object. The execution requires serious intellectual process or technical stimulants. A ceramic practitioner absolutely needs good intellectual capacity

In the addition to affective capacity. Therefore, ceramic will undergo excellent process. To have a particular shape, some stages of intellectual process are needed to realize the expected shape. The execution process requires seriousness to result in the appropriately expected objects.

### 4. Involvement of the Five Sense

Creating Ceramic require sensory, physical, and mental preparedness and calmness. When we are not cautious when operating the rotating technique, the outline will be totally damaged (Noor Sudiyati: 2007) and the shape will be imperfect. After the execution, the shapes still undergo special treatment such as finishing of the shape, finishing of decoration, drying, and burning. The half ready object has to be humid enough to enable further shaping. Therefore, full concentration is needed when creating ceramic products.



Figure.15  
Chinese-Influenced Ceramic from Singkawang.

Hand building of ceramic requires preparation of pattern with appropriate technique. Technical standardization is required to have ceramic objects. The thickness of the body has to be proportionate to the height and width as well as the tips of the clay and the functions of the object. Decoration contain message and impression. When presented in appropriate technique, the ceramic objects will be perfect.

Physical, mental, and spiritual health is needed when creating ceramic objects. In other words, the work of ceramic creation cannot be done recklessly. Loyalty and totality are absolutely needed. They are pre requirements for excellent ceramic objects that will earn respect. They will be respected, maintained, and appreciated like those ancient Chinese



ceramic that fill up museums all over the world.

### 5. Ceramics Culture Keep Up With Human Civilization

Ceramics have been and will always be needed in human life cycle. When a baby is born, he needs a *kendhil* to contain his placenta to be buried in the ground. The *kendhil* will return into the place where it belongs: the earth. The placenta put into the *kendhil* buried in the ground will disappear in some time later. Only the accompanying objects that remain. In Javanese tradition, the placenta is accompanied with sewing tools (needle and thread), Writing tools, and Quran verses. The verses are intended to reveal invocation for the baby. *Kendhil* is usually buried in the front yard or the side yard. After buried, the *kendhil* is covered with a *kuali* (*kendhil* of larger size). Or else, bamboo fence is built around the *kendhil* and a lamp is put on for several days. If the baby is female, the placenta to bury is the left of the main door, while if the baby is male, the placenta is buried to the right of the main door.



Figure. 16  
Container for traditional snacks

Likewise in wedding ceremony. Earthen objects are needed such as *cobek* to contain *jenang* (soft liquid blender rice), small *kendhil* to put lawe thread, *kendhi* for fresh water in siraman ceremony the water of which is taken from 7 sources. Another object is *kreweng* for *dawet* buying to symbolize modern coins. Anybody who has traditional event will use *kreweng* from burned clay with biscuit technique to keep it natural in round shape just like the modern coins.

*Kendhi* is also used in the traditional ceremony of *tingkeban* in 7 month pregnancy. *Kendhi* is use to have ritual bathing for the pregnant women. The water contained in the *kendhi* is taken from seven sources and is mixed with some kind of flower (rose, jasmine, *kenanga*, and *kantil*). When the water runs out, the *kendhi* is broken into pieces. It is believed that if the *kendhi* broken into halves then the vetoes will be a boy. We don't know for sure. The ceremony is intended to ask for God's blessing for the safety in the world and in the hereafter for the mother and the baby.

In the modern 21 century, married is sacral and respected. The wedding ceremony is expected to be the one and only for life. Therefore, the wedding is celebrated in ritualistic and sacral ceremony. The level of sacredness depends very much how the couple comprehend and appreciates the wedding. Of equal importance, they will join in a humanistic new life. During the ceremony, some artifacts and properties are used to represent different meanings for the married couple and expectations from their respective parent.

Ceramics are present in ritual ceremonies of humans, even in the very simple form. The earth is always present during the important moments, directly or indirectly stating however close we are to the earth.

One's comprehension about clay material that represent the earth invokes enlightenments of life, defense, and cosmic appreciation to lead better national characters. Our nation tells us much about locality and the homeland. It also teaches us about the place where are belong and mythology on the homeland (Noor Sudiyati: 2012).

### 6. Conclusion

The material ceramic is clay, Ceramics are close to our daily life. We all deal with ceramics, either in simple or in modern and contemporary complicated visual arts. Simple pottery ceramic are needed for ritualistic events such as in baby birth, wedding, pregnancy syndrome, and 7- month pregnancy to name some. Even modern Javanese people will still use ceramics in wedding ceremonies. To make ceramic artisans will have to involve the five senses. Ceramics have to be processed, shape, and burned in high seriousness, sincerity, clean mind, and high obsession. They are needed to create functional, good, and beautiful ceramics as expected.

Ceramics keep up with human civilization and tradition. Ceramic come along with human's daily activities ranging from simple traditional events to complex use in buildings and containers. Until the 21st modern age, humans still need simple objects to keep up with human's important evens. For example, the material of *kreweng* cannot be substituted



with any other materials. *Kreweng* must be made from clay burned at low temperature (terracotta). *Kendhil* for placenta container still exists. Until future time, simple ceramics will still be used to keep up with human development.

Ceramic as culture material or civilization society icon, on the develop art it's be create expression way of artists. (Rifky: 2014. 48).

Ceramics in visual arts have become esthetic objects. They became media of expression. Ceramic design are not limited to functional objects such as tableware, but also interior objects and decorative ceramics such as jewelry and other objects. (Asmujo Jono Irianto: 2014. XXX).

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