

## Aesthetics of the Bidayuh Community Kasah Mat Annah Rais Longhouse

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### ABSTRACT

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*Kasah* mat or *Kelasah* mat is one of the handicrafts known in the Bidayuh ethnic group. Weaving the *Kasah* mat is a heritage art made of rattan and woven using wood bark. This study is about the aesthetics of *Kelasah* mat of the Bidayuh community located in Annah Rais Longhouse. Annah Rais Longhouse is a village located in the foothills of the Borneo Highlands and must-visit tourism which are located near Kuching; Sarawak. Therefore, the focus of this study is the material of mat production. This study was conducted with qualitative method and interviewed the residents of this longhouse also known as the producer of this *Kasah* mat. The study revealed that besides concentrating on reviving the culture value, the community of Bidayuh can generate their income through selling this culture product. As a conclusion, the materials used by the manufacturer is to highlight the aesthetics of a mat that is the pride of the Bidayuh people.

**Contribution/Originality:** The paper's main contribution is to determine the authenticity of Bidayuh products using materials and manufacturing methods. As a result, it contributes to the aesthetic of weaving.

## 1. Introduction

This study is about *Kelasah* mat produced by the Bidayuh in Annah Rais Longhouse, Padawan, Sarawak. *Kelasah* or also known as *Kasah* mat is a handicraft that is traditionally practised by the Bidayuh community and still has various functions that can be used. This study will explain the materials used to produce this mat which will ensure this mat is entirely original from natural sources. This study also examines how, and the processes and methods used to understand this method.

The Bumiputera community of Sarawak, namely the Bidayuh. This community is one of the most famous to produce various handicrafts in Sarawak. The uniqueness of their lifestyle and culture drives them to produce a variety of high-quality handicrafts as it uses produce from natural resources. The Bidayuh community in Sarawak can be divided into four groups, but there are not many differences (Chang, 2002). The largest Bidayuh community group in Sarawak is the Bukar-Sadong Bidayuh community located in Hulu Sadong Serian. The second largest in the Bidayuh Bipuruh community opened villages in the interior of Kuching district. Next is the Bidayuh Bau-Jagoi community located in the Bau district, and the last is the Selako-Lara Bidayuh community, primarily located in the Padawan district. Annah Rais Longhouse is a village located in the foothills of the Borneo Highlands and must -visit tourism which are located near Kuching, Sarawak.

The village has also been recognized by the Ministry of Tourism and made it an opportunity for the community to market the products or handicrafts they produce, one of which is *Kelasah* mat. The village is close to the mountains and is the border between Sarawak and Kalimantan. *Kasah* mat is a mat produced by the Bidayuh people who have their own cultural values. The researcher was focus on *Kasah* mat which originates from Annah Rais Village. This village known as famous for its tourist attractions, uniqueness and originality of longhouses is an attraction. There are sales of cultural products such as *tuak*, *bakul tambok*, bead chain. In addition, visitor can experience themselves by visit the Bidayuh's Headhouse known as *Baruk* and dance performance (Yunitha & Guntur, 2019).

In addition, Show House is a traditional Bidayuh house, tourists can feel or see how the Bidayuh lived in ancient times. This can be related to the culture in Puncak Borneo to local and foreign communities who are interested in the culture of the indigenous people of Sarawak. Figure 1 shows the *Kelasah* mat originated from the Bidayuh community and has been inherited from time immemorial and is still maintained until now.

Figure 1: *Kelasah* Mat



Source: Kampung Annah Rais Padawan, Sarawak

This mat is a mat made entirely of rattan. The materials of this mat are the result of natural resources from the forest, namely rattan and tied using durable wood bark and is known as the Baiyuh tree. This mat is the pride of the Bidayuh community and is one of the cultures or traditions inherited since the decline. The daily lives of those who produce crafts and plus they have been surrounded by natural resources that allow them to get the advantage of sourcing their raw materials to produce craft items.

Weaving is an act or occupation that connects thousands or hundreds of sheets of rattan, bamboo, skewers and so on to be made into craft items. Weaving the *Kasah* mat is a common job done by women before. However, the Bidayuh community does not only rely on women to weave this mat because men are also very skilled and reliable because they are the majority who weave this mat. The men are not only skilled in weaving with high quality results, but they are also the ones who collect and find rattan and other materials in the forest. This *Kelasah* mat weaving is estimated to be of high value which can reach up to RM500 and above depending on the size woven. The price factor needs to be understood by the buyers which is not the case, collecting materials in the forest requires strong energy and strength to find suitable and high-quality materials. Plus, the weaving process that connects thousands of rattans is done by connecting between two sheets that can be called Male Rattan (Long) and Female Rattan (Short) by intersecting the rattan which takes quite a long time to complete. Therefore, the price has been set in accordance with the quality, effort and time that has been given.

In the past, this mat was often used for drying rice (the locals call it *Kasah Pedawat*) and until now it is still practiced. These mats are also used as footwear, seating mat during festivals where residents gathering to celebrate together at *awah* section of the longhouse (Chang, 2002). Nowadays, these mats start to be done on their own and the material search is also on their own. The quality of this mat is determined by the material used and if the material is not of quality, then the mat will be easily damaged and not durable. Typically, the durability of this mat will be seen through the bonding material used. Some people use wood that is easily damaged and use tree bark that is easy to find. Nowadays, this mat has gradually changed its material and among the ones that are often seen is the *Kelasah* mat which is made of plastic. This mat made of plastic has lost its originality and is more towards the modern way. Therefore, the durability of these mats can be determined through the plants used.

According to Kamal (2018), in producing quality handicrafts it requires a source of raw materials so that the handicrafts are completely original. It is important to maintain the product quality that could build better customer-brand relationships (Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2004). To produce this product the importance of raw materials from forest sources because it is believed to maintain the integrity of the product in the long term. Moreover, there are some consumers who highly value the quality and quality of the product. Lack of concern of the current society to learn about the art of weaving and understanding the manufacturing methods and functions of a product. These days, community involvement in cultural activities is getting low due to trending attraction such as digitalized influence among youth. Next, lack of promotion related to *Kelasah* mat art has resulted in less popular handicraft products. Sitanggang, Sinulingga and Fachruddin (2019) mentioned that to selling its cultural product will be face with good strategy of marketing so that their product can be sold to customer. Furthermore, it is about the sale techniques of how high the quality of the product is given to consumer and to achieve the satisfaction customer towards the quality of product. The objective of this

research is to study the originality of the material source used in producing the mats and identify the method of manufacture and function of Kelasah mat.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Community**

The meaning of community is people who living in a place and face-to-face also contact with each other every day (Goel,2014). Meanwhile, Ibrahim (2007) defined community as group of people living in a same place, practicing a degree of autonomy and their own way of life. Willingness to sharing aspirations and desires, participating in daily activities, united by a sense of belonging and having a close connection in all aspects of life.

### **2.2. Cultural Product**

Cultural products known as handicraft product, ethnic product that lives in generation among community (Kumphai, 2020). This product has great potential because of its unique features that are symbolic of a culture (Wherry, 2004). Some community takes this opportunity to market this cultural product as one of their incomes. Most of them market small -scale products because they prioritize the local market. But there is also producer who prioritize these cultural products in the international market that market on a large scale. Therefore, this cultural product able to provide benefits to the community, including the country's economic sector, instead of maintaining cultural values.

### **2.3. Handicraft**

Handicraft is one of the arts that produces the most interesting heritage and tourism products due to the identity factor of a craft product. Many domestic and international tourists come to the country for aesthetics, because of culture, and heritage. Handicrafts are tourism products that aim to attract markets both within and outside the country (MacCannell, 1976). Sahari and Hassan (2011) argue that handicrafts are defined as activities or product production activities on the factor of hobby activities or individual favorite activities. In addition, handicrafts are traditionally shaped objects that are traditionally produced and used for generations because of ancestors. The production of a handicraft does have certain functions such as daily use. Handicrafts are made items that have a very high artistic value and can be made into commercial crafts for sale can be sold.

In addition, Omar, Lepun and Alan (2016) stated that the production of a handicraft has now been greatly influenced by the presence of modern technology such as equipment and machines that have been introduced to handicraft product makers greatly help them simplify manufacturing methods previously done manually or traditionally. Furthermore, the modification and adaptation of traditional motifs in contemporary craft products suggests the existence of changes in the development of handicrafts in Sarawak.

### **2.4. Woven**

The art of weaving is a handicraft that cannot be separated from the local community in Malaysia and in the archipelago in the past 300 years ago. Weaving is a diverse process that is intertwined between the materials used for the weaving process. Products made

by weaving can include of handbags, slippers, mats, curtain, and basket as decoration nor accessories (Thin, 2016). Weaving from the aspect of material use, the past used natural materials that are easily found in the environment such as forests and settlements such as bamboo, wood, and rattan are commonly used in the manufacture of craft products, (Omar, Lepun & Alan, 2016).

Baharudin et al. (2014) stated that the materials used are based on plants in forests, swamps, villages and around the coast such as pandan leave, *nipah*, bamboo and *bertam*. Furthermore, the current generation is less exposed to skills and knowledge in weaving activities. Usually, this knowledge is usually obtained from ancestors who were educated directly. However, the current of technological modernity has dominated the life of the community causing most of the production of weaving art is produced using technological machines due to the lack of people who are skilled in the field of weaving art.

### 3. Methodology

Annah Rais Longhouse, Padawan district was chosen as the location area for this study since the district has the most contains the Bidayuh community's handicraft producers. Thus, it was a suitable and convenient site in terms of getting access to a producer that willing to cooperate in this research. The research used qualitative method to obtain the relevant information. The researcher conducted this research by qualitative method and interviewed two informants in Annah Rais Village, Padawan, Sarawak. This village is 60.7 kilometers from Kuching (1 hour 6 minutes). Each of informants takes 40 minute to interview and they also demonstrate on the making of Kasah mat.

### 4. Result

Findings of this research are based on the objective that has been stated before. Namely Mr. Gess @ Tonny anak Sargu and Mrs. Kabiak Anak Mayot are Bidayuh community and small farmers in Annah Rais Village, Padawan. Initially, they produced these kelasah mats as part of their hobby and are now starting to engage in small-scale business activities. Mr Tonny has been making Kasah Mats for 30 years, he learned to make Kasah Mats since he was in his 20s. The technique used to produce Tikar Kasah from Mr Tonny's grandfather has inherited the way Kasah Mats are made.

#### 4.1. Production Of Materials and Equipment

##### 4.1.1. Ingredient

Based on the information obtained, the preparation of materials is the first step before producing the *Kelasah* mat. The Figure 2 down below shows the materials used by Mr Tonny are based on forest resources, namely rattan and wood taken from the top forests of Borneo. According to Mr Tonny, the production of materials and tools from forest resources takes time. The lengthiness of period used to collect is due to environmental and weather factors. According to the myth of the Bidayuh community told by Mr Tonny, if the moon is complete, it is understood that the rattan tree can be harvested after that time because it is believed that the tree will produce good quality.

It emphasizes the authenticity of materials and tools by using forest resources. However, today's forest resources are dwindling, and it is not easy to produce such material.



Therefore, before looking for material in the forest, the size of the *Kasah* mat must be taken into account to facilitate the process of making the *Kasah* mat. After getting the size of the *Kasah* mat, then look for the material from the forest, and it will take several days according to the size requested. For example, if the requested size is 5.5m x 7.3m, it takes 2 to 3 days to take material from the forest.

Figure 2: Rattan (left), Bark (right)



#### 4.1.2. Tools

Tools are things that help to facilitate the process of making mats. The equipment used is made from forest resources such as trees to produce knives and others. Several tools are used to produce *Kasah* mats, such as Wood (*Rigiwan*) that used for wrapping the bark and knife (*Sindek*) for cutting rattan and others. These tools were shown in [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#), *Rigiwan* and *Sindek*.

Figure 3: *Rigiwan*



Figure 4: *Sindek*

## 4.2. Manufacturing Process

### 4.2.1 Cutting Process

This process is the process of cutting and slicing rattan. In [Figure 5](#), Mrs Kabiak demonstrated the cutting process and cut according to size and shape. Then, divided into two, namely male rattan and female rattan. The purpose is to differentiate the rattan that has been cut so that it is easy for the following process weaving (*Ririk*).

Figure 5: Slicing rattan



### 4.2.2. Soaking Process

In this process, the bark (*Baiyuh*) will be cut to appropriate measurements and soaked in water for 1 minute and has been shown in [Figure 6](#). After that, in [Figure 7](#) shows the bark is wrapped using wood (*rigiwan*). According to Mr Tonny, this process is done to soften the bark to be easy to use during the weaving process.



Figure 6: Soaked the bark

Figure 7: Bark wrapped around wood (*Rigiwan*)

#### 4.2.3. Weaving process

*Ririk* is a rattan weaving process that has been divided according to the gender of rattan. For this *Kelasah* mat, Mr Tonny only maintains the originality of the mat without having to produce a motif for this process. Based on the [Figure 8](#) and [Figure 9](#), this process requires both sides of the legs to hold the rattan to ensure the condition of the woven rattan is parallel and neat.

Figure 8: Weaving mats





Figure 9: Weaving mats



#### 4.2.4. Binding Process

After weaving the rattan, Mr Tonny explained that binding is the final process that needs to be tie with rattan using bark that has been wrapped tightly with wood (*rigiwan*) at the end of the rattan was shown in [Figure 10](#). The purpose of this process is to tie the entire rattan that has been woven so that the mat looks neat and sturdy.

Figure 10: Bark tied to rattan



## 5. Discussion

Overall, *Kelasah* mat has its own values such as cultural, tradition and aesthetic which emphasize the Bidayuh's community. Nowadays, society is very concerned about the authenticity of the product in terms of the use of materials used to produce this cultural product. Based on the information, the informants used materials from forest resources as they are believed to have excellent quality value and to ensure the product durability in a long term and to prevent from damage. High-quality material compared to *Kasah* mats by Serikin Village. They used plastic as the primary material. Although, nowadays through the currents of modernity but these producers still maintain the originality of the product compared to other producer who use plastic as the main material for the production of this mat. The quality of this mat is determined by the material used, and if the material is not of quality, the mat will be easily damaged and not durable. It shows

that informants is very concerned about product quality to ensure customer satisfaction is achieved.

The production of *Kasah* mats requires a high degree patience and takes a long time to produce such cultural products because the producer needs to comply with every process to achieve the perfection of the product. Furthermore, depending on the measurement of the size ordered by the consumer and if bigger size requires a long time to produce. Not only that dependency on forest resources that are used as the main ingredient for production. As informant mentioned, *Kasah* mat was used to dry the paddy since olden days and in new era it has been diversified in its use. The researchers identified that the effort to market of this mat is fewer encouraging makes less attractive and low connection to buyers.

## 6. Conclusion

*Kasah* mats have a cultural value for the Bidayuh that have been used for centuries. Nowadays, many young generations especially from rural area are less keen to getting involved in handicraft industries due to lack of personal motivation (Hassan et al., 2017). The community needs to emphasize the knowledge of skills such as training through capacity development program in producing these handicraft products also to produce skilled generation of these handicraft skills. The production process of *Kasah* Mats requires high precision and finishing to maintain the quality of the product and to enhance the aesthetics of *Kasah* mat Therefore, the result of the high-quality of materials used by the manufacturer is to highlight the aesthetics of a mat that is the pride of the Bidayuh people. Although, this mat only shows plain pattern it still manifests the aesthetics and originality of this mat. For the recommendation, researcher suggest participating any festival or event that related to arts and culture to attract potential buyer. On the other hand, producer can market their product through Mycraftshoppe, e-Kraf Bazar known as a platform for marketing strategy which it believed to attract the customer.

## Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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