

# The Uniqueness Form of Kendi from the Museum Collection

**Azra Nazirah Azhar\***

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam,  
Selangor, Malaysia  
Email: azraara1996@gmail.com*

**Arba'iyah Ab. Aziz\***

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam,  
Selangor, Malaysia  
Corresponding author  
Email: arbaiyah@uitm.edu.my*

**Mohamad Kamal Abd. Aziz\***

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam,  
Selangor, Malaysia  
Email: mkamal054@uitm.edu.my*

Received Date: **15.11.2022**; Accepted Date: **15.08.2023**; Available Online: **20.09.2023**

*\*These authors contributed equally to this study*

## ABSTRACT

In Southeast Asia, the *Kendi* is regarded as a type of traditional pottery. It can also be found in other countries, such as Asia, and the Middle East, and some European nations. Despite this, its usage is strongly related to Southeast Asia's culture. According to the study, although *Kendi* is no longer used in society, it is still used for home decorating. Misunderstandings and confusion regarding its usage have been caused by the word *Kendi*. In addition, younger generations may not be familiar with the type of shape and use of *Kendi* due to various technological innovations, such as water filters. The research aims to classify and identify the various characteristics of *Kendi*. In order to collect in-depth information, qualitative research methods which include observation and interview, were used. As a result of this research, it has become clear that *Kendi* comes in many forms. The shape of the *Kendi*, which is not only focused on one shape such as the shape of the round body, makes it a unique artifact. This research helps the community understand the value of art and *Kendi*, and it is hoped that various parties can do further research on it. This is because the *Kendi* has a variety of unique shapes and looks to be studied. The museum can also use this discovery for future research and knowledge. It is intended that future academics examine the form of this *Kendi* in greater depth, not only on the motifs and forms but also on the art of carving and the manner of creating *Kendi* found in Malaysia in particular.

**Keywords:** *Kendi, Traditional pottery, Form, Characteristics*

## INTRODUCTION

People in Southeast Asia have used *Kendi* for a long time in rituals and everyday life. It is a well-known type of vessel in this region. Gold, silver, or bronze are used to make the *Kendi* and its predecessor, the *Kundika*. In sculpture and painting, the *Kendi* is often seen in the hands of the Hindu gods Brahma and

Shiva, Maitreya, the future Buddha, and the compassionate Avalokitesvara (in Mahayana Buddhism). It was used to hold holy water that had been blessed by the gods and collected from sacred rivers. It was used in the coronation ceremony of a king, who washed himself with the water as a symbol of being clean (Dawn, 2003).

*Kendi* is a Malay term that is derived from the Sanskrit name *Kunda*, which is derived from *kundika*. Some academicians believe that the term *Kendi* developed from the word *Kundi*, which in turn derived from the word *kundika*, which means "water vessel" (Phyo, 2011). It is well known that the spout and neck without the handle are the distinguishing features of *kundika* and *kendi* vessels. The *kundika* features an oval or pitcher-shaped body with a long, sharply pointed neck and a tiny hole in the center. The lengthy neck is separated by a circular flange that supports grasping (Dawn, 2003).

*Kendi* is used for a variety of ceremonial purposes and specific rites in addition to their primary function as containers for drinking water. The *Kendi* is a well-known vessel type in Southeast Asia, and it has played a vital part in the region's ceremonies and everyday life from ancient times (Dawn, 2003). The aim of this research is to determine the uniqueness of the form of the *Kendi* collection from the National Museum Malaysia, Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, and Museum of Asian Arts. In order to achieve the research objective of obtaining information, the study is guided by the following objectives, which are to identify and classify the characteristics of the form of *Kendi*.

This research will have significant implications for the country's development sector since a tourism product can attract a large number of visitors to a region, given that a product like the *kendi* is a tool used in daily life and would evoke memories of its use. Therefore, heritage artifacts such as *kendi* are a significant instrument for the tourism industry due to their distinctive appearance, which allows them to attract a large number of tourists and enhance the competitiveness of tourism sites (Mustaqin & Wahyuningsih, 2015).

Besides that, the goal of this study is also to help them in researching and understanding the significance of aesthetic quality in art, as well as the uniqueness of the *Kendi* form, in order to aid them in their future research and knowledge. Students will also gain a new understanding as a result of this investigation, particularly in regard to the form and function of the *Kendi*. This research may be utilized to learn more about the *kendi*, including its form, function, and motif, and to increase our understanding of it. The findings of this inquiry will be valuable to the museum unit as a source of information for future investigations.

This study has two limitations, one of which is a lack of previous research on the subject. There have not been many studies done on *Kendi* by prior scholars. This is because research is currently concentrated on pottery such as *Labu Sayong* and *Terenang*. Furthermore, the lack of Malaysian *Kendi* makers is a weakness of this study. This is because there are no *Kendi* makers, making it difficult for researchers to identify *Kendi* with distinct characteristics, particularly in Malaysia. *Kendi* manufacturing could not continue due to a lack of *Kendi* makers in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been several studies in the past that have addressed the early history of the appearance of *Kendi* in Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. The prior study that was utilized in this part is about the views of previous researchers on topics linked to the form of *Kendi* and its motif, as well as the role of the usage of the *Kendi* in everyday life, religion, and ceremonial settings.

### Historical Background

For thousands of years, *Kendi* have been made and sold extensively across Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that *Kendi* was first created in China during the Tang Dynasty (618-906 CE), it was mostly

exports from Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam that became significant producers (Karen Loh, 2019). There is no known date or location of origin for *Kendi's* creation. There have been discoveries of ancient, spouted beakers in southern Europe, West Asia, Central Asia, North India, North China, and Japan, leading some to speculate that *Kendi* may have originated in one of these places. West or South Asia is usually considered to be the most likely source of origin, in part because of linguistic similarities between West and South Asia and Southeast Asia (Khoo, 1991). The widespread usage of the *Kendi* in contemporary South-East Asia shows that it has been around for a long time. Despite the fact that archaeological evidence for the early era exists, as well as scientific data for the first appearance of the *Kendi* on the island part of the area, the evidence is too fragmented to build a chronological framework.

The *Kendi* is believed to be used only in Indonesia and to have only been introduced to Europe as private property after being discovered there. The fact that the *Kendi* occurs often in Dutch paintings from the seventeenth century demonstrates the item's appeal at the time as an exotic thing from the Orient (Adhyatman, 1987). *Kendi* is known by several different names in Indonesia, depending on the location or culture in which it is found. It is referred to as *Kundi*, *Gundi*, or *Kamandalu* in Java. On the Indonesian island of Lombok, it is referred to as *Ceret* or *Cerubuk*. South Sulawesi is referred to as *Busu*, Aceh is referred to as *Geupet Bahlaboh*, and Lampung is referred to as *Hibu*. However, in Indonesian, the jug is referred to as *Kendi* (Winata, 2019).

Pottery is available in a number of forms in addition to its traditional shape, which is characterized by a circular body section and a long, high neck. In addition, there is pottery with a nozzle (spout) that is formed like a glass of milk. *Kendi* is the name used in ceramic (pottery) terminology to describe pottery that has this form.

When pottery was created, it is likely that the artist had certain goals in mind. The significance of Malay pottery in the history of pottery production in the eastern nations may be traced back to the 16th century. A source of inspiration for the country's pottery manufacturers and makers, this Malay pottery has been around for centuries. This has been self-certified by archaeologists from the Chinese government, who claim that the *Kendi* were alien to the Chinese people living in China at the time of their discovery. The *Kendi* that is created is tailored specifically to fulfill the needs of the Malay people across the archipelago (Othman, 1981).

## Forms of Kendi

The *Kendi's* form has changed significantly throughout the ages, but it has always had a more or less spherical body, a straight neck, and a spout situated at an angle on the shoulder with no handle, regardless of the period (White, 2018). The *Kendi* seems to have been created with the intention of being held at a precise height in order to allow water to be poured into the mouth. The bottle is filled from the neck and held by the neck, and the water is sipped from the spout of the bottle (White, 2018). *Kendis* are available in two variations: plain and patterned. The form may be either masculine or female in appearance, with the male form having an angular shape with square shoulders and the feminine form being round in appearance. When it came to particular uses of the forms, there was no tradition that specified how they should be utilized (Loh, 2019).

*Kendi* has a circular body, a straight neck, and a mouth that resembles a bottle. The *Kendi* is distinguished by a spout situated at an angle on the shoulder and the lack of a handle. The *Kendi* may have originated as a metal shape since the junctures of the neck and spout at acute angles to the body are metallic traits (Mendoza, 2014). The shape of the *Kendi* may be determined by specifying the proportions of certain sections (anatomy of the form). From an anthropological or archaeological standpoint, the *Kendi* contains at least three significant anatomical components: the orifice, the body, and the base. From an aesthetic standpoint, the container often comprises the lip or mouth, neck, shoulder, belly, and base or foot. In addition, some shapes feature the head, throat, spout, handle, or waist, which may be described in further detail (Winata, 2019).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The investigation was carried out using a descriptive qualitative methodology through fieldwork in the form of interviews and observational studies, as well as collecting research. This investigation makes use of a qualitative descriptive technique in conjunction with a cultural perspective. Fieldwork in the form of interviews with curators, specialists on *Kendi*, and collection studies are among the activities that are included in this investigation. The process of collecting data starts with an overview of research, investigation, information retrieval, and documentation, as well as a comprehension of the aims of the study. Data were gathered via official interviews, photos, and video recordings in addition to observations and site visits. Field research in the form of observational interviews with curators and other professionals who are knowledgeable about *Kendi* and collection studies was carried out in Kuala Lumpur. The National Museum of Malaysia, Museum Department of Malaysia, Museum of Asian Art, Universiti Malaya (UM), and Islamic Art Museum Malaysia are among the institutions that were explored during this research. The appropriate museum curators were the subjects of the interviews that were carried out.

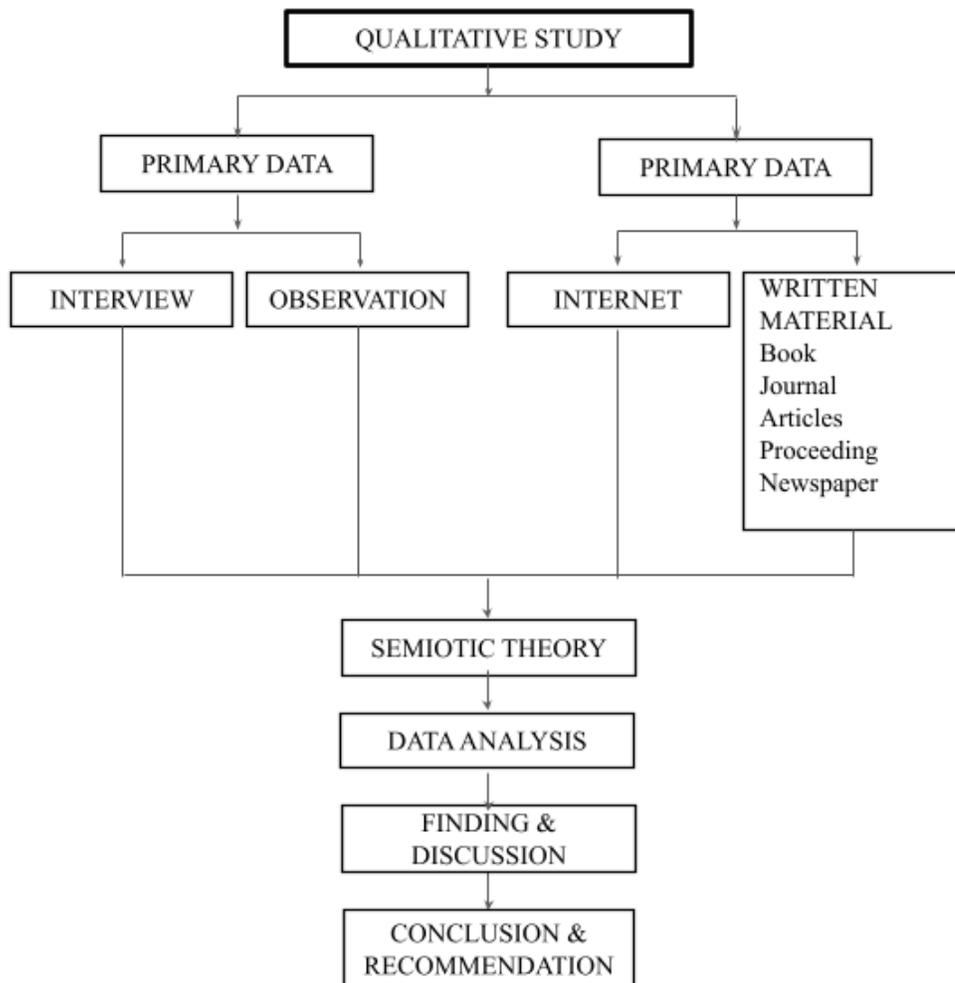
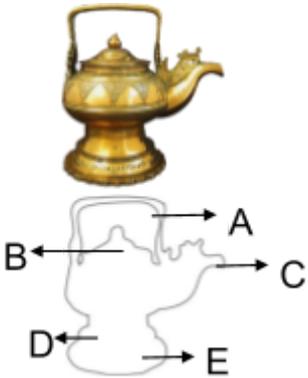


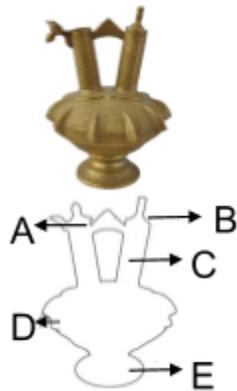
Figure 1: Research Framework

## FINDINGS

The findings of the investigation are summarized and displayed in table format in the report. In addition, a discussion of the findings is provided to investigate the solutions to the study issues. Most of the information comes from a collection of 13 *Kendi* that are housed in three different museums in Malaysia: the National Museum, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, and the Museum of Asian Art. There are only five *Kendi* selected for this journal. The purpose of the study is to identify and classify the characteristics of the different forms of *Kendi* that have been responded to. Interviews, observations, the internet, and various printed materials such as books, papers, and journals were used to collect primary and secondary data, respectively. The data was acquired from these various sources.

**Table 1. The Form of *Kendi***

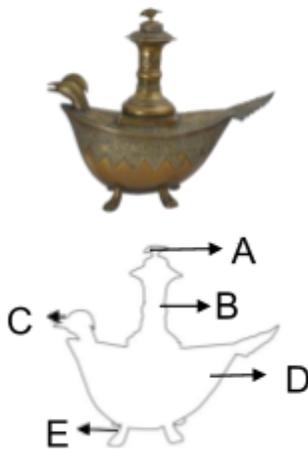
Kendi	Form
 <p><b>Figure 1: <i>Kendi 1</i></b>                  (Source: <i>Kendi 1</i> is from National Museum Malaysia)</p>	<p>A. This <i>Kendi's</i> handle has a long and wide curved design that resembles a bridge connecting two points.</p> <p>B. This <i>Kendi's</i> lid is shaped like a mosque dome. Because this <i>Kendi</i> is from Malaysia, it's probable that the lid was taken from the dome of a mosque, which is a place of prayer for Muslims.</p> <p>C. This <i>Kendi's</i> spout is designed like a bird's beak. A bird with a tapering beak is used as a model for a <i>Kendi</i> spout. Birds are also associated with the archipelago, like pigeons, which served as messengers in ancient times.</p> <p>D. This <i>Kendi's</i> body is shaped like a semicircle.</p> <p>E. This <i>Kendi's</i> base is quite broad, like a bowl.</p>



**Figure 2: Kendi 2**

(Source: Kendi 2 is from Islamic Art Museum Malaysia)

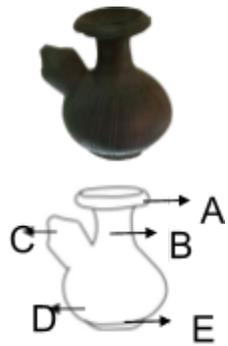
- A. This *Kendi 2* features a cover that is formed in two different ways: one like a leaf, and the other like a pea.
- B. This *Kendi's* spout is shaped like a circle.
- C. This *Kendi's* neck resembles a little bamboo tree. Bamboo became popular in ancient times when it was used to make rafts and house poles. As a result, the shape of the *Kendi* neck is inspired by the appearance of a significant shape in Malay society.
- D. The *Kendi's body* has the form of a spherical cushion and is ribbed flat. The ribbed body form is in the shape of a pumpkin, or a kind of sour fruit known to the Malays as *Asam Gelugur*.
- E. This *Kendi's base* has a base that is shaped like a wide base.



**Figure 3: Kendi 3**

(Source: Kendi 3 is from Islamic Art Museum Malaysia)

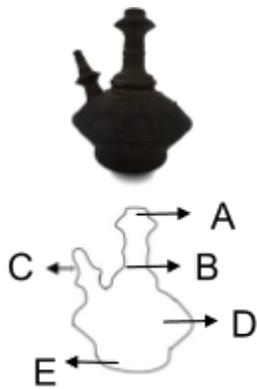
- A. This *Kendi* has a bird-shaped lid and a wider mouth shape.
- B. This *Kendi* is lengthened and has a tiny dent neck for easy hold.
- C. The *Kendi* spout is designed to resemble the mythological bird Garuda. The eagle is a source of pride for the Indonesian community since it contributes to the country's harmony.
- D. This *Kendi* has a body that is shaped like a boat. It is because this *Kendi* was used in the era of trade, making the shape of the body of this *Kendi* resemble a boat used during sailing.
- E. This *Kendi* has four legs in the form of a zoomorphic animal.



**Figure 4: Kendi 4**

(Source: Kendi 4 is from Museum of Asian Art)

- A. This *Kendi* has a portion that resembles an open hat at its mouth.
- B. The *Kendi* has a narrow neck for easy holding.
- C. This *Kendi* has a mammiform spout, which means that its shape is similar to that of a woman's breasts when seen from above.
- D. This *Kendi* has a body in the form of a pear.
- E. This *Kendi* has a small concave shape base.



**Figure 5: Kendi 5**

(Source: Kendi 5 is from Museum of Asian Art)

- A. This *Kendi's* mouth area has the appearance of being somewhat tapered and expands as it moves lower, taking the form of a cap.
- B. This *Kendi* has a neck form that is characterized by a high baluster and a broad collar that is attached to it.
- C. This *Kendi* appears to have a spout in the shape of a bulbous, ringed spout.
- D. This *Kendi* has a body that is shaped like a "flying saucer," and the waist of the *Kendi* is angular.
- E. This *Kendi* has a tiny concave base form.

## Classifying the Characteristic of form of Kendi

**Table 2. The Characteristic of Kendi**

No	Kendi	Characteristic						
		Handle	Lid	Spout	Mouth	Neck	Body	Base/Foot
1	National Museum Malaysia							
	<i>Kendi 1</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
2	Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia							
	<i>Kendi 2</i>	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Kendi 3</i>	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
3	Museum of Asian Art							
	<i>Kendi 4</i>	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Kendi 5</i>	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

According to the results of identifying and classifying the characteristics of *Kendi* through the three museums, it can be observed that the *Kendi* in the National Museum of Malaysia has all of the characteristics linked to *Kendi*, with the exception of the neck. Although there is not a *Kendi* at the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia that has a handle, there are two *Kendi* that have a lid, two *Kendi* that have a spout, one *Kendi* that has a mouth, and two *Kendi* that have a neck, body, and base or foot. At the Museum of Asian Art at the University of Malaya, there are two *Kendi* that have a spout, mouth, necks, bodies, and base or feet

## CONCLUSION

The chosen *Kendi* have several shape features, including a handle, lid, mouth, neck, spout, body, and base or foot, as determined by the find. Depending on how each pitcher is made, it has a unique set of features and shapes. Because it is the most prominent aspect of the *Kendi*, the shape is often depicted on the body and spout. The specialty of the *Kendi* makes it a Malay heritage that must be protected. In Malay culture, *Kendi* is frequently used as a tool for daily use or ceremonies, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia. This is due to the fact that it has historically been a significant instrument that has been utilized by this civilization. It should not be forgotten, and it is to be utilized frequently so that younger generations will not forget how to use it properly. The aesthetic value of the *Kendi* is frequently connected with an underlying meaning that serves as a description of societal philosophy, values, beliefs, ideals, and even standards.

The cultural inheritance that serves as the foundation for today's generation's lives should be treasured and respected. Those who are aware that *Kendi* exists will have a greater appreciation for its function, as opposed to viewing it merely as an exhibit in the museum by itself. Crafts such as making *Kendi* like this one deserve to be preserved and brought to the attention of the general public by a number of different groups. In addition, it is impossible to protect this history without first achieving a deeper level of comprehension. Because there are not many people in Malaysia who create *Kendi*, the existence of *Kendi* in the country is not widely known. It should be the obligation of the party responsible to enhance the number of experts in the creation of the *Kendi* in order to ensure that they are not lost to history throughout the course of time. It is recommended that the study of the *Kendi* be expanded throughout Malaysia in order to gain a deeper understanding of the appearance of the *Kendi*, that are not only in museum collections but also in the hands of individuals, so that this history is not lost.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank the National Museum of Malaysia, the Islamic Art Museum of Malaysia, and the Museum of Asian Art for their assistance and cooperation in completing this study. This study would not have been possible without the assistance of Prof. Alias Yusoff, Mr. Abd Aziz Abd Rahsid, Mr. Izuan Fadzli, and Mrs. Zaleha Tasrib in terms of research findings. I also want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, who regularly helped, advised, and shared information with me as I completed this research. Lastly, this article journal is dedicated to the memory of my father, mother, and siblings, who had the foresight and resolve to educate me. This achievement is dedicated to my cherished family.

## REFERENCES

- Adhyatman, S. (1987). *Kendi: Wadah air minum tradisional (Traditional drinking water container)*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Himpunan Keramik Indonesia.
- Dawn F. R. (2003, February 14). *Kendi in the Cultural Context of Southeast Asia*. Retrieved from [http://rooneyarchive.net/articles/kendi/kendi\\_album/kendi.htm](http://rooneyarchive.net/articles/kendi/kendi_album/kendi.htm)
- Winata, G. (2019). Kendi Indonesia, Bentuk dan Tradisi. *Jurnal Sositologi*, 18(3), <https://doi.org/10.5614/sostek.itbj.2019.18.3.19>
- Khoo, J. E. (1991). *Kendi. Pouring Vessels in the University of Malaya Collection*. Singapore Oxford University Press.
- Loh, K. (2019, December 16). *Kendi*. Retrieved from <https://museumvolunteersjmm.com/2019/12/>
- Mendoza. (2014). *Hadrian Mendoza*. Retrieved from <https://hadrianmendoza.com/introduction>
- Mustaqin, K., & Wahyuningsih, N. (2015). Kendi Sebagai Pendukung Kebudayaan Nusantara. *E-Jurnal ISBI Bandung (Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia)*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.26742/ATRAT.V3I3.373>
- Phyo, Z. (2011). *Kendi: The Characteristic Vessel of Bagan Period*. Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science, Department of Archaeology, Dagon University.

Othman Mohd Yatim. (1981). *Tembikar China berunsur Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara

White, M. (2018). Kendi: The Long Journey of a Little Water Vessel. *PASSAGE, Singapore: Friends of the Museums, May/June 2018, 24-25.*