

SURVIVING TRADITIONAL MUSIC INSTRUMENTS OF DUSUN TINDAL WITHIN ITS MODERN COMMUNITY IN KAMPUNG TINUHAN

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Abstrak

Kertas ini meneliti alat muzik Dusun Tindal yang dijumpai dalam masyarakat moden di Kampung Tinuhan. Kampung Tinuhan terletak di Tenghilan di barat utara Sabah. Dusun Tindal tergolong dalam kumpulan etnik terbesar di Sabah iaitu Kadazandusun. Sejak 1990-an, Dusun Tindal di Tenghilan telah mula kehilangan sebahagian besar daripada budaya tradisional muzik mereka. Walau bagaimanapun, kumpulan etnik ini masih terus memegang beberapa tradisi kuno mereka, sungguhpun kini terdapat perkembangan muzik baru yang bertujuan untuk meneroka ke dalam industri muzik tempatan dan demi mengekalkan kepentingan anak-anak mereka dalam mempelajari alat muzik tradisional. Kertas kerja ini melihat kepada struktur fizikal dan unsur-unsur muzik dalam alat muzik tradisional Dusun Tindal yang berkaitan dengan kehidupan harian masyarakat etnik ini.

Kata Kunci: Alat Muzik Sabah, Alat Muzik Dusun Tindal

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Abstract

This paper examines the Dusun Tindal surviving musical instruments currently found within the modern society in Kampung Tinuhan. Kampung Tinuhan is situated in Tenghilan at the northern west of Sabah. Dusun Tindal belongs to Sabah's largest ethnic group, Kadazandusun. Since the 1990s, Dusun Tindal in Tenghilan has begun to lose most of their old musical culture. However, the people still keep hold of some of their old traditions, although there have been new musical developments that aim to venture into the local music industries and retain their young children's interests in learning the traditional musical instruments. This paper looks into the physical structures and musical elements of Dusun Tindal traditional musical instruments in relation to the ethnic people's daily life.

Keywords: *Sabahan Musical Instruments, Dusun Tindal Musical Instruments*

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1.0 Introduction

This paper reports the research conducted in Kampung Tinuhan, Tenghilan, Sabah dated from January 2009 to June 2010. The Dusun Tindal communities disperse widely on the west coast of Sabah around places such as Penampang, Papar, Tuaran, Kiulu, Tamparuli, Tenghilan, Kota Belud and near the hills in Ranau, Tambunan and Keningau (Pugh-Kitingan 2004). Kampung Tinuhan is one of the villages in Tenghilan that marks the highest population of Dusun Tindal ethnicity. Kampung Tinuhan is a rather small village, undergoing muscular movements of modernization as the villagers gradually abandon their traditional way of life. This research aims to discover, document and preserve the surviving Dusun Tindal traditional music instrument before it dies out.

This research has taken efforts to co-operate with the Head of the village, Mr. Sentri Lombuti, and their traditional musicians to delve more in depth into the musical traditions of Dusun Tindal. Field trips were conducted by our research team within the year under full assistance and guidance of Dusun Tindal villagers. We have closely worked with Mr. Moffen Gondoloi (Head of Bamboo Orchestra), Mr. K. Albert (traditional music teacher of Tenghilan High School), Mr. Giansing Lakansa (main music instrument maker in Tenghilan), Mr. Sarabun Malas (former Village Head), and Louzim Pantai (Chairman of Committee of Welfare & Development in Kampung Tinuhan from 1985 to 1989) and other elderly villagers.

The study collects the surviving musical instruments and music that are still found in Kampung Tinuhan. Music has been created and practiced by Dusun Tindal people in their daily life since the ancient time and it is a functional tool that serves the ethnic communities towards well development and prosperity of their people. Throughout the history, the people have not intended to affix their music into any rigid musical systems such as musical modes, scales, notations and harmony but retain the natural beauty and profoundness of music all along in their common practices reflecting their ways and philosophies of life.

Music and life are intimately connected in Dusun Tindal culture. Music is considered something natural, at the same time sacred pertaining to the spiritual understanding of the universe. As could be found, the musical instruments are constructed entirely from the resources of nature and designed in producing beautiful and moving indigenous sounds manifested from the natural surrounded living environment in coalition with profound realizations and understandings of spirituality of life.



The musical concepts and meanings derived from the deep experiences and wisdom of the ancestors of Dusun Tindal people are vital in this study to understand the core of the ethnic music itself.

2.0 Methodology

Kampung Tinuhan is a village with the distance approximately 10 minutes drive away from the town of Tenghilan. Kampung Tinuhan is about 25 square kilometers in size with an estimated population of 350.

Tenghilan is a small town (around 400 hectares) located on the west coast of Sabah, Malaysia, within the district of Tuaran. It is situated between the capital city of Kota Kinabalu and city of Kota Belud. The distance from Tenghilan to Kota Kinabalu is approximately 38 kilometers (about 45 minutes' drive).



Figure 1: Map of Tenghilan Town



There are about 132 families (85 Dusun families, 26 Sino-Dusun families and 21 Bajau or other families) and a population of 570 as in 2009 in Kampung Tinuhan. Yet as in 2010, only 350 villagers still inhabit in the village, while the rest have migrated to other areas or towns. Kampung Tinuhan was built by the Sabahan indigenous people from the northern side of Sabah such as Bundu Tuhan, Ranau and Pinasang, Kota Belud.

Today, approximately 94% of the villagers are descendants of Dusun Tindal, an ethnic group categorized within Kadazandusun (the biggest ethnic group comprising one-third of the population in Sabah) due to the sharing of closely related traditions and dialects. The remaining 6% of the population consists of Iban, Bidayuh, Bajau, Sino-Dusun and Malay (who migrated to the village through marriages) (Sentri Lombuti, 2009-10).



Figure 2: Dusun Tindal and their house in Kampung Tinuhan. Photo: Author.

¹ Sino - Dusun are mix blood descendants of Chinese and Dusun people in Sabah (Lombuti 2009-2010)

The life in Kampung Tinuhan is very simple and contented. It is developing rapidly towards modernization and, like other villages in Tenghilan, gradually abandoning the traditional living styles and culture. Compared to the modern and high speed civilizations in the cities of Malaysia and other parts of the world, Kampung Tinuhan can be considered one of the communities that live between the ancient and the modern.

Majority of the villagers are adherents of Christianity and Catholic. Roman Catholic Church and Seventh Day Adventist Church are commonly found in the village. Islam is practiced among smaller groups and the villagers are usually converted to Islam through marriages. Animism was the local belief in the past but it had barely survived due to the immersion of Christianity and Islam.

Celebrations, such as *Pesta Keamatan* (Harvest Festival), wedding ceremonies and birth parties, are held very often in the village as a tradition to enrich their daily life with happiness, entertainment and relaxation through playing music, singing, dancing, and playing simple village games. Hanging around with friends in the town or in other nearby villages is a norm for the villagers. However, the young ones usually prefer to travel to the big cities in Sabah or other states in Malaysia hunting for better-paid jobs (Gondoloi, 2009-10).

Dusun Tindal people in Kampung Tinuhan have lived very hard life as farmers, fishermen, food hawkers, small businessmen and etc. with low income and quite difficult living conditions. It is a natural need for the people to relieve their weariness and burden through musical entertainments and social events. Abiding to their understanding and experiences of life, happiness is vital and prioritized to ensure healthy growth and achievement of prosperity in their communities. The people are striving to retain the traditional mentality of communion socialization as their central lifestyle and the fundamentals for their cultural activities and heritage.



3.0 Results and Discussion



Figure 3: Young Dusun Tindal players of sompoton, suling and bungkau. Photo: Author.

The traditional musical instruments of Dusun Tindal are mainly made of bamboo wood, bronze or brass, and goat or cow skin. The ones still exist today are *suling*, *sompoton*, *tongkawir*, *tongkibong*, *bungkau*, *kulintangan*, *gongs* and *gandang*. Under the great influence of modernization, bamboo drum, bamboo guitars, bamboo rak and xylophones are invented as contemporary musical instruments copying the modern western musical instruments. The adding of new innovations aim to attract the younger generations in keeping their musical traditions and striving for further advancement and achievement in their musical performing arts.

Comparing between the semi-modernized and traditional musical instruments of Dusun Tindal, the traditional musical instruments produce more natural and complicated sounds and music mirroring the nature and living beings, whereas the semi-modernized musical instruments imitate the modern musical sound and composition of the popular music.

Mr. Giansing B. Lakansa, a Dusun Tindal musical instrument maker from nearby Kampung Kayangat supplies most of the musical instruments for musicians in Kampung Tinuhan and other parts of Sabah (Lakansa, 2010).

The instrumental ensembles that still exist in the village are *mengagong* or *mangagong* (which means “beating the gong”). The *mengagong* gong ensemble uses traditional percussive musical instruments - *gong lapos-lapos*, *gong mongoluton*, *gong songkoluon*, *gong dindihon*, *gong ponohuri*, *kulingtangan*, *gandang* (Gondoloi, 2009-10).

3.1 Sompoton



Figure 4: Sompoton. Photo: Author



Figure 5: Sompoton blowing position. Photo: Author

Sompoton is a very well-known traditional musical instrument of Kadazan-Dusun in Sabah. It is regarded as a means of entertainment as well as a symbol of cultural identity to the Kadazan - Dusun people and the state of Sabah.

The villagers play *sompoton* as a solo musical instrument that expresses their inner feelings, emotions, love and thoughts. They may play *sompoton* in the rice field, farms, jungle, beside rivers or in the porch of their atap house at night. The musical instrument is also played together with other traditional bamboo musical instruments such as bungkau, suling, tongkungan, tongkibong etc in ensembles during social celebrations and ceremonies.

Sompoton is traditionally tuned in pentatonic scale, which is not confined to any particular keys. The pentatonic tones tuned in *Sompoton* may differ from one village to another depending on the instrument maker, the musician or the musical norm of each village. However, there are attempts being made recently by the elder musicians to add in few more tones to form the 12-tone tuning system of western music. The purposes of the changes are to enable the musicians to play other genres of popular music and songs, and eventually to attract the Dusun Tindal youngsters to learn the considered outdated musical instruments. However, the pitches in the scales used vary from one *sompoton* to another depending very much on the different music instrument makers, musicians and the aesthetical sounds preferred by each different village. Traditionally, Dusun Tindal people have not designed any definite musical system in their traditional music. The music they create takes a free form without any fixed musical structures or rules. Their musical compositions are mainly based on feelings, emotions and cultural aesthetics of the individual or collective composers. Most of all, their musical performances are not meant for stage-setup, but are carried out with specific functional cultural values and meanings.

Nowadays, some newly innovated *sompotons* are capable of playing diatonic and chromatic scales, both popular and jazz songs. Sompoton can be played by an individual as solo anytime for self-entertainment. There is no particular taboo for playing *sompoton*. The sompoton also accompanies other musical instruments in dance performances such as Sumazau, borrowed from Kadazandusun. The *sompoton* plays an essential part in *Sumazau* dance to provide various rhythmic signals for the dancing steps and movements (Pugh, 1997).



3.2 *Suling*

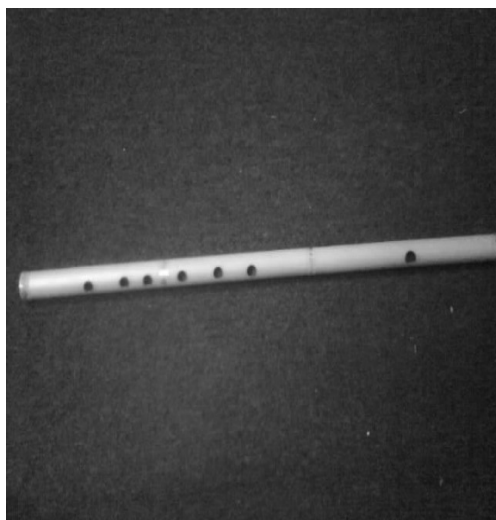


Figure 6: *Suling*. Photo: Author



Figure 7: *Suling* blowing position.
Photo: Author

Suling is an aerophone made of bamboo. The player blows air into a hole at the end of *suling* to produce sounds. There are five, six or seven holes on the body of *suling* and it is played horizontally. It is a very important musical instrument for Dusun Tindal people because it plays melodic lines for the dancers and functions as the main core of a music composition that is usually accompanied by other musical instruments such as *sompoton*. Figure 8 shows a *suling* very similar to the Chinese Diqu (end blown flute). According to Mr. Sentri Lombuti, the flute is made by a Dusun Tindal villager and only the methods of wrapping the body of the flute might be an adaption from the flute of China, Singapore or Taiwan (Sentri Lombuti, 2009-10).

Suling is also used for personal entertainment and its sweet and melancholic melodies could often be heard in the past during night hours after all the villagers returned from their fields. Today, many villagers still love to play *suling* in their daily life to express their feelings and thoughts, when they are in the field, beside the river, in the woods of the jungle or at the porch of their atap houses. Dusun Tindal people understand the needs of human nature to express their inner selves so that he or she may feel a meaningful



existence of own self in his or her life. *Suling* music is also utilized to communicate or keep intact with the natures as well as to express their love, belonging and gratitude towards the Mother Earth (ibid.).



Figure 8: *Bungkau* playing positon. Photo: Author.

3.3 *Turiding/Bungkau*

Bungkau or *turiding* is a mouth idiophone that is made from the skin of *palma* wood called polod. It is the smallest musical instruments of the Dusun people in Sabah. Dusun Tindal people in Kampung Tinuhan explained that one needs really delicate hands and mind (patience, diligence, sharpness, thoroughness and etc.) to measure the shape and to build the *bungkau* or *turiding*. *Sepilut* is placed in the middle of the body of *bungkau*

and functions as the resonator. The *bungkau* is flicked or struck with thumbs to produce sounds. The size of the sounds is small but the volume is increased by the reactions of the sound-wave reflections and rotations when the musical instrument is put inside the front part of the mouth, manipulated by the volume of the mouth and position of the tongue (Lakansa, 2010).

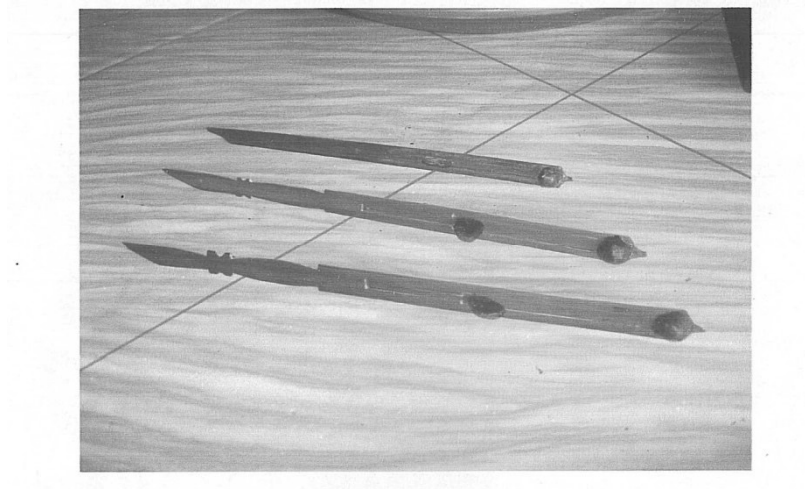


Figure 9: *Bungkau*. Photo: Author.



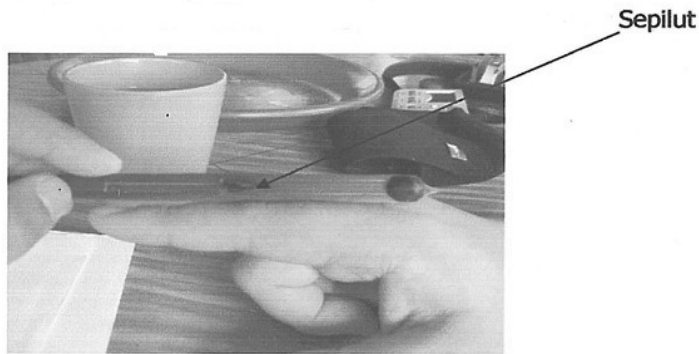
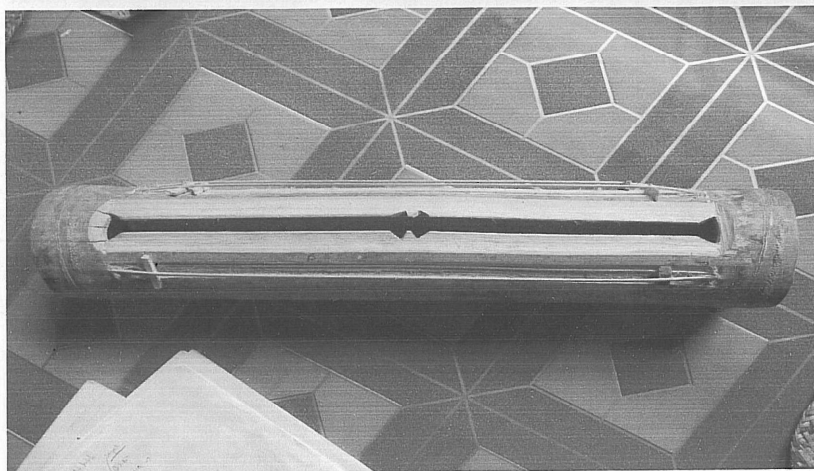


Figure 10 : Measuring the length of the body of *bungkau* by using fingers. Photo: Author.

Turiding or *bungkau* is kept and protected in a small bamboo tube so that it would not get broken easily and can always be kept clean. In the past, the idiophone was usually played to pass leisure time when the villagers felt bored. It was a solo musical instrument and it could not produce definite pitches. In the old days, *bungkau* plays farewell and battle songs, to imitate the sounds of nature and insects to attract edible lizards or to tease and attract young girls. Today, it is played solo for personal expressions or pleasures. Besides,

it imitates gong ensemble music to accompany singing or perform in weddings, festivals & celebrations. In addition, it is also added in music ensembles to enrich the textures and aesthetical beauty of the music (ibid.).

Wedges For Tuning Pitches



Tongkungon

Figure 11: Tongkungon. Photo: Author.

3.5 Tongkungon

Tongkungon is a chordophone made from *betung* bamboo trees that grow near the edges of rivers. The large bamboo is cut into strings on its surface. Small wedges are fixed under the strings at each end and function as tuning pegs. The wedges can be moved to shorten or lengthen the strings to tune their pitches (Pugh-Kitingan 2004: 126). A stretching hole in the middle part of *tongkungon*, facing the performer, magnifies the volume of the sounds before the sounds are projected out.

Normally *tongkungon* has four to six strings in Kampung Tinuhan, depending on the *tongkungon* maker and player. However, *tongkungong* can be found having four to fifteen strings among Dusun communities in Sabah. The pitch, name and number of strings



correspond to the *gongs* of the community the *tongkungon* originated. The intervals between the pitches may differ from one *tongkungon* and one maker to another since the gongs have different tunings from one location and one maker to another. Just like all other Sabahan musical instruments, there are no fixed rules or definite musical tuning system. All the musical sounds and tunings are basically dependant on certain aesthetical preferences and habitual practices of the specific village or music group. Tongkungon is used for personal relaxation and entertainment, at the same time, it is also used to accompany dances or performed in ensemble during festivals or celebrations in the village (Lakansa, 2010).

3.6 *Tongkibong*

Tongkibong is in the danger of extinction in Kampung Tinuhan as the only *tongkibong* musician died recently and nobody knows how to play the instrument in the village. The villagers are trying to revive the musical instrument by purchasing and learning the music instrument from nearby Dusun Tindal villages. *Tongkibong* is played solo for personal pleasures and expressions, as well as performed in ensembles to accompany dances during festivals and social celebrations (Gondoloi, 2009-10).





Figure 12: Tongkibong. Photo: Author.

3.7 Gong Ensemble

An ensemble of gong is found in the village which consists of *gong lapos-lapos*, *gong mongoluton*, *gong songkoluon*, *gong dindihon*, *gong ponohuri*, *kulingtangan*, *gendang*. The gong ensemble, named mengagong or mangagong ensemble, is used in big events such as wedding ceremonies, harvest festivals and social ceremonies. This is practiced especially among those who preserve the musical traditions from one generation to another without fail or those who hold high status in the village (ibid.).



3.8 Gongs

There are five gongs in *mengagong* or *mangagong* ensemble in Kampung Tinuhan: *gong lapos-lapos*, *gong mongoluton*, *gong songkoluon*, *gong dindihon* and *gong ponohuri*. The gongs are made of bronze or brass with knobbed boss in the middle and thin or deep rims (depending on the gong makers). Gongs are believed by villagers in Kampung Tinuhan to have been originated from China, Philippine, Indonesia or Brunei. However, the villagers are uncertain of the real origin of the first gongs found in their communities. The villagers would call the gongs that are lighter in colours as “original gongs” passed down by their ancestors. These “original gongs” are believed to have been brought in from foreign countries such as Indonesia and Brunei during the time when their people or other Sabahans did not have the knowledge and skills to make their own gongs (Sentri Lombuti, 2009-10).

Gongs that are thinner would have higher pitches and those that are thicker would have lower pitches. However, there are several sets of tunings found in the gongs in Kampung Tinuhan. The tuning depends on the gong makers in other villages such as Kampung Sumangkap in Kudat who supply gongs to most of the communities in Sabah (ibid.).

In the early 1900s, gong was a symbol of family wealth and used as bride wealth or dowries for marriages. Traditionally, it was also used in animistic religious ceremonies and accompany dance in rituals, for signaling in the village, as dunsai-beats in funerals (Pugh, 2004). Today, the functional nature of gongs has changed as modernization took place in Sabah. The villagers rarely use the gongs for purposes mentioned earlier. Today, the gongs are performed in ensembles such as *mengagong* or *mangagong* to accompany *mongigol* dance, to welcome guests or to celebrate important social events such as wedding ceremonies, Pesta Keamatan (Harvest Festival), First Birthday of Child and “Naik-Pangkat” celebrations. (Malas, 2009-10).





Figure 13: Gong *lapon-lapon* and *ponohuri*. Photo: Author.

3.9 *Kulintangan and Gandang*

Kulintangan is a set of seven to nine brass kettle gongs tuned in pentatonic scale. It was traditionally played to accompany dances in ritual contexts. Nowadays, it is played in gong ensembles during important ceremonial and social occasions such as wedding ceremonies and Pesta Keamatan.

In *mengagong* or *mangagong* ensemble, *kulintangan* plays the main melodies and functions as the leader of the ensemble to start and end the music or to signal for a change in musical rhythms and patterns. A *kulintangan* player is usually a virtuoso and skillful player as compared to other players in the ensemble. The *kulintangan* musical style is always improvised, varied and flowing free in every performance. However, there are two to three tones that are the main keys in *kulintangan* melodic patterns that the player would repeat more often than other tones and would return to those specific tones after every variation.



This conforms to the Dusun Tindal life concept of “down to earth” (ibid.). It is a reflection from the mentality of the musicians with the life concept taught by their ancestors through their culture to possess feelings of humbleness, steadiness and stability in their hearts and music even when they become excited in the music and take off very far in his sophisticated improvisations. It also indicates the wisdom of Dusun Tindal people in utilizing their music as a channel towards the cultivation of inner calmness and humbleness among their people. Those good inner qualities are essential for their people to become successful and to achieve goodness in their whole life for themselves and also for the world (ibid.).



Figure 14:Traditional *Kulintangan* set. Photo: Author.

Gandang used in the gong ensemble is a one-sided drum played with two wooden sticks. The drum is made from goat or cow skin. It is tuned by loosening or tightening the pegs that are inserted around the rattan of the drum. *Gandang* plays the role of supporting the music with steady and accentuated beats (Gondoloi, 2009-10).

4.0 Conclusions

The traditional instrumental music of Dusun Tindal in Kampung Tinuhan reflects the natures, thoughts, culture and life philosophies of their own people. Through the music instruments and the music produced, one is able to learn more and develop further understandings about the villagers. We also discover that the Dusun Tindal villagers have wisely used their music to benefit their people and communities. It seems that there is a danger of losing all the good values and knowledge within the music since modernization sweep through the state of Sabah and most of the young generations tend to abandon their old culture. Many of the young children look down on their own people and lifestyles, and pursue modernized and materialistic music and lifestyles.

It is notable to be aware of the Sabahan traditional music instruments that are being used in popular music bands, and the styles of Sabahan traditional music that are prone to imitate contemporary Western or Asian popular music. And it will be interesting to discover the reasons at the back of all the changes and extinction taking part in Sabahan traditional music which is also happening to most of the traditional music throughout the world; and it is also beneficial to find out the roles each ethnic music plays in their own as well as other communities around the world.



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