

**The Sarawak Museum Journal****Vol. XXXIII No. 54****December 1984****ISSN: 0375-3050****E-ISSN: 3036-0188**

Citation: Hoo, W. T. (1984). Some Notes on Coconut Pearls. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XXXIII (54): 235-244

SOME NOTES ON COCONUT PEARLS**Wong To Hoo****PART 1**

1.1 As a young lad still schooling in Sarawak in the early twenties and thirties I had often heard passing references to a mysterious pearl referred to as coconut pearl. The local population whether, Malay, Iban or Chinese often refer to it as "Batu Kelapa" — that is, coconut stone. Some villagers merely mention "Buta" meaning blind in reference to the popular belief that coconut pearls are exclusively found in blind coconuts.

Later in the forties, fifties and sixties while I was in the employ of the Sarawak Medical Department as a Medical-officer, I had further opportunities of close contacts with the various local population. Again this mystery of the coconut pearls was mentioned now and again.

According to local belief many magical benefits are attached to the owner of such pearls, such as it can be used as a wheedle charm, in business dealings or even in court cases in the owner's favour. It is equally a charm to make one strong and confident, or a general-protective to keep either oneself or one's family from spells cast by one's adversary or from serious sickness. But above all it has the reputation of a supreme quality that it has power to protect the wearer from offensive weapons such as spear, sword, kris and even bullets, and popularly referred to as "Jimah Kebal".

This last belief is persistent and is extremely wide-spread, thus proving that this legend of the coconut pearl is indeed deep-rooted in ancient history.

SOME NOTES ON COCONUT PEARLS

by

Wong To Hoo*

Part 1

1.1 As a young lad still schooling in Sarawak in the early twenties and thirties I had often heard passing references to a mysterious pearl referred to as coconut pearl. The local population whether, Malay, Iban or Chinese often refer to it as "Batu Kelapa" — that is, coconut stone. Some villagers merely mention "Buta" meaning blind in reference to the popular belief that coconut pearls are exclusively found in blind coconuts.

Later in the forties, fifties and sixties while I was in the employ of the Sarawak Medical Department as a Medical-officer, I had further opportunities of close contacts with the various local population. Again this mystery of the coconut pearls was mentioned now and again.

According to local belief many magical benefits are attached to the owner of such pearls, such as it can be used as a wheedle charm, in business dealings or even in court cases in the owner's favour. It is equally a charm to make one strong and confident, or a general-protective to keep either oneself or one's family from spells cast by one's adversary or from serious sickness. But above all it has the reputation of a supreme quality that it has power to protect the wearer from offensive weapons such as spear, sword, kris and even bullets, and popularly referred to as "Jimah Kebal".

This last belief is persistent and is extremely wide-spread, thus proving that this legend of the coconut pearl is indeed deep-rooted in ancient history.

* The author Dr. Wong To Hoo is a locally educated boy during the Rajah Vyner Brooke Regime.

He served as Medical-officer in the Sarawak Medical Department.

He was Sarawak first State Malariologist. Later he served as Medical-officer (Administration and Planning) at the State Medical Headquarters in Kuching.

He has since retired and runs his own private clinic.

His other interest and hobbies are many, among which are ceramics in South East Asia, cultural history of South East Asia and their artifacts.

Of course the real origin of the legend dates back even much earlier than recent written history.

From the casual exposure to the legend of coconut pearls, I gradually developed in the early 1970 a more concerned interest on this subject.

Several acquaintances related to me that they had once witnessed a coconut pearl in one of the coconuts they personally opened themselves at first hand. These are simple people who only broached the subject when I incidentally mentioned it. They had no reason to lie at all.

In the whole of S.E.A. where coconuts are abundant, a supposed coconut pearl is valued by all communities be they the indigenous or Chinese community. They are supposed to bring luck in general to the wearers and such pearls according to respective sizes are either attached to a ring or a locket to be worn.

Only about a dozen or so more serious contenders' claims of real coconut pearls are in the possession of some prominent Chinese business families in S.E.A.

As one mingles intimately with the local population one begins to become aware that claims of possessors of coconut pearls are not too infrequent, giving rise to the question that its real rarity is under question.

Further studies reveal that this popular claim is really unfounded. To get an idea of its true rarity, one must realise that coconut is very common in S.E.A. including Indo-China, Ceylon and South India. In these countries many families have traditionally worked in such copra-producing plantations. Yet generation after generation of copra working could not claim to have opened one single coconut with a pearl. Strange as it seems though coconuts are abundant in the countries mentioned, not all these countries can claim to be pearl-producing areas.

Oddly enough certain areas in certain countries seem to have the repute of coconut producing regions, e.g. the northern part of Makasar in the Celebes among which two small islands of Buru and Boeten are famous.

1.2 The anatomy of the cocount with reference to that part that is engaged in the production of the mysterious pearl

The pearl producing area is located at the broad base of the nut where it is attached to the stalk which connects it to the coconut tree. At this end when once one removes the outer husk one is faced with the hard shell, one shall see at once three dark eye-like depression-marks.

Eye one is normally called the *porous-pervius*, the pore or hole is covered merely by a soft-kernel membrane, the germ cotyledon in its growth normally and easily pierces this soft membrane and grow outwards. Two other so-called pores are *fake-pores*. They are fully protected by the hard-shell, are closed and has only the semblances of pores. These are termed "Pori-caecus".

In rare circumstances the pores-pervius is *totally-absent*, thus leaving the nut hermetically sealed. Such nut is known as "Kelapa Buta" or blind coconuts.