

Conference Paper

The Beauty of Malay Woodcarving Motif Ornamentation

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Abstract

Woodcarving art has been bequeathed throughout the generations until present time and is a hidden heritage gem. The aim of this research was to interpret the motif of Malay woodcarving ornamentation. This was done by scrutinizing the golden proportion in the structural design of Malay woodcarving and elucidating the Malay aesthetic elements and fundamental principles of the new motif design in contemporary artwork. This research revolved around a master carver who with his own eccentric style incorporates the Malay aesthetic elements and principles into his work. In order to understand the intricate motifs of woodcarving artwork, it is vital to look at the structural motifs. Referring to Malay Arts such as Nakula, Abdullah Mohamed and Awan Larat Philosophy, each motif interpretation has its own distinctive meaning. This can serve as a guideline for any associated artwork fields, especially for an artist to create a new design by implementing depth and meaning into the whole artwork, while keeping the distinct Malay identity.

Keywords: motif, Malay woodcarving, meaning

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1. Introduction

Being listed among the world's biggest timber resource countries, trees grows abundantly in Malaysia, especially in the Peninsula of Malaysia. Timber or wood were used since earlier civilization without ceasing. It got to the point where it became part of the Malay culture which can be seen from their traditional house which now is Malaysia heritage. Aside from renowned as materials for construction, wood also is recognized to be used for agricultural activities, protection equipment, etc. In the olden days, the art of refining wood into all kind of utilities are considered unique and mastered majority by Malays. For entertainment, the woods are refined as folks entertainment such congkak

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and gasing. Kompang, gendang, gambus and serunai are one of the items crafted from wood. The timber plays an important part in the evolution of transportations as it was used as bull carts and coaches for horses.

2. Problem Statement

Malaysia has a diverse artistic heritage such as craft art that has been practised before the rinderpest. It is a way for Malaysians, especially Malay to embed their culture in the arts of woodcarving. Woodcarving has been prominent mostly in the Eastern coastal states of Peninsular Malaysia where it can be noticeable from the design of houses and ships. It is also implied in the arts of traditional cinematography such as wayang kulit (puppetry) and art of crafting, wau (traditional Malay kite) which now has been Malaysia's historical remarks. The art of woodcarving signifies the synergy between Malay trademarks in architecture and its own values of dignity in Malay culture.

This study focuses on to delineate every aspect of woodcarving art from A to Z while deciphering the Malay philosophy and culture using motifs as reference. The outcome of this study can be used as a guideline not just to students, but also to every artist or people who be interested in Malay's woodcarving. The rapid advancement of technologies and modern architecture has imposed a risk of overshadowing the art of woodcarving. The prestigious legacy of woodcarving will fall to its demise if no immediate actions are taken.

The knowledge of woodcarving art passed down throughout the generations in order to live up to the heritage. As a stakeholder to prolong woodcarving art, the government provides various initiatives by calling out experts and master woodcarver to foster guidance for future generations. This can ensure the birth of experts in woodcarving art who is able to deliberate the altruism of the art in patterns or motifs and capable of comprehends symbols and philosophies in Malay culture.

3. Historical Research

Historical research is an analysis of a heritage referring to past events that transpire in a certain community [1]. A primary source is vital to supporting factual evidence. Historical research comprises thorough research of past events by entailing a precise explanation of those particular events [2]. An interview with the person who experienced it is one method of primary resources. Using the stored data, past history is structured and written through the manifestation of imagination which is called the writing of history.

Through interviews, observation and analysis of item or events, traces of history can be determined and establish a genuine trust of historical fact events.

4. Nusantara

Woodcarving arts dates back to the Mesolithic ages which the civilization is renowned to be the pioneer in woodcarving. The most common society at that time was Polynesian and Melanesia society. To retaliate against the harsh environment, they inhabit stone caves as their primary sanctuary and hunting as their ways to get sustenance [1]. For leisure, they opt to carve however, it doesn't represent any special design or motifs. These primitive artworks often found carved on the wall of the caves and behind these sketches and carvings, it works like a diary that records their daily activities. With limited knowledge of managing resources, they tend to be nomadic. A constant migration and relocation made them recreate carvings on the cave walls, spreading the art of carving entire land.

5. Types of Woodcarving in Terengganu

The art of Malay woodcarving possesses an exotic and distinctive style. People in Terengganu commonly use 4 types of woodcarvings which are Tebuk Tembus Melilat, Engraved Taps, Engraving Ships and Engraving Without Engraving [3]. The same topic was also published in a book titled "Malay Wooden Carving" produced by Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation in 2009. There are two ways to appraise woodcarving art which is in two dimensions (2D) and three dimensions (3D). 2D woodcarving is a representation of carving from a single surface angle such as woodcarvings on doors, wall decorations, etc. [4]. Meanwhile, the 3D carving exists from multiple surface angle which can be seen on sculpture, agriculture equipment and even traditional games such as Congkak.

A carving without silat is a technique also known as Engraving without Engraving. The technique abolish the vacant area that don't have any engraving patterns. The motifs would appear when the patterns decay. Carving Outselling is interchangeable with Engraving without Silat [6]. The only thing that holds these carvings different apart is Carving Outselling uses carving with silat. On the other hand, Engraving Bronze Engraving is more or less similar to Engraving without Silat which the motifs are kept flat without silat by punching engraving onto the hollow surface making holes. In short, these two technique have the same silat, but Engraving Bronze Engraving have holes

engravings. Lastly, the Plywood Shrimp Engraving is more or less similar to Engraving without Cuts except a motif exist with silat on it

Silat is greatly known as the famous Malay martial art, but in this context, it is a carving art motif [3]. Silat that often used in the production of wood carving art consist of six types, which is Silat Minangkabau, Silat Belah Rotan, Silat Dada Tuma, Silat Bunuh Juring, Silat Leper, and Silat Serong. Silat Minangkabau is a silat that has sharp edge formed from a punching edge sideways flattened. Silat Belah Rotan or Silat Bulat is an intricate silat often used as carving for vegetative motifs. Silat Belakang Lipas or rather Silat Dada Tuma is a silat less inferior to Silat Belah Rotan. Meanwhile, Silat Leper is silat with flat shape while Silat Bunuh Juring is a form of silat with no ledge at top. Lastly, Silat Serong or Silat Sodok is an oblique silat.

6. Motif

Abdullah Muhammad or known has Nakula as his pen name, came up with this philosophy. Malay's philosophies and history is nothing new to him. A new design of motif can be achieved by creating the best matchup between smaller two-dimensional or three-dimensional carved jewellery. The elements in Al-Qur'an and Al-Sunnah has been influencing the motif design in woodcarving, the same as in the Middle East. It consists of Islamic calligraphy, floral motifs, geometric motifs and space motifs [4]. If a design has humanoid or fauna motifs, it will be altered to give it authentic values. The most common motifs incorporated in woodcarving design is the Chinese flower, sunflower, evening duck, cloud and shoot. Each owns a philosophy with description the culture and values of the practising society.

In Malay art carving, a large embedded cloud used as a motto exhibited in conveying messages to the public. The decorative ornament is capable enchant the eyes of the public, thus unveiling the messages as well. The philosophy in the design of Awan Larat is tumbuh berpunca (to merge from a source), tajam tidak menikam (sharp yet unstabbing), lilit tidak memaut kawan (to twine but not to strangle) and punca penuh rahsia (source full of secrets). All kind of messages and advice were hinted at in these philosophies deliberately for the community. The 'head of clock' is the term given by a large cloud design that starts with circle drawing. Kepala (Head) refers to beginning while kala refers the ending which similar to from cradle to grave' philosophy. Human's life started with birth and ends with death.

There's another version of Awan Larat motif, which is Ibu motif or Awan Larat Beribu. These specific motif is pivotal in the cloud design as it gives a reference point for the

stem or sulur to start. This Ibu motif is substantial compared to the rest and it controls the remaining space on the wood carving surface by carving it at the centre of space.

The illustrations of divine elements and social elements are often portrayed by the larch cloud motif which conveys positive values for every society. This philosophy can be identified as humanity and divinity. The Laring cloud philosophy can be divided into three parts, Awan Larat Berpasu, Awan Larat Beribu and Awan Larat Sorok Punca. God's creation which is unimaginable to humans such as the creation of Earth, hells and heaven are symbolized through these three clouds. This beliefs is known as the qidam (sempiternal) attribute of Allah and described in details in Al-Qur'an and Al-Sunnah.

Motif with wide cloud conveys respect and humanitarian philosophy. Bow down to each other as an act of respect proved this motif embodies the message. Famously known as Awan Larat Berpasu, it has potted motif in its design and commonly used in interior design of Malay architecture. The Awan Larat Sorok Punca literally means hidden from the start and untraceable.

Awan Larat design consists of six essential elements which are leaves, flowers, fruits, suckers and sticks [5]. Each of them holds its own meaning and is a must to have in the design of Awan Larat. The natural occurrence of human life is resembles from the element of stick. Leaves, fruits and flowers defines the triumph obtained.

According to a prescribed philosophy, the stem breaks can be carved to make it exit the first stem or for it to appear. Next, the third steak should come out from the second stick. This exquisite stick arrangement philosophy warns of the significance of civilization among the community [6]. Respect among human being is held high and strongly emphasized in Malay cultures. The shallow knowledge should respect the knowledgeable like a student to their teacher and young respect the older like a child to their parents. The stem dissection reveals that for a community to achieve goals or vision, it must starts at the bottom while the spiral circle represents the importance of consensus in mutual agreement that is adept by the Malay society.

Malay traditional motif can be constructed with three basic developments [7]. The first phase is about various line such as horizontal, meander, vertical, spiral and intersection are possible to develop using the dotted element. The second phase delineates the continuous carving of long lines, edging lines and curve lines or meander lines to manifest patterns. The final steps is to combines the similar motif into a group and thus created a pattern.

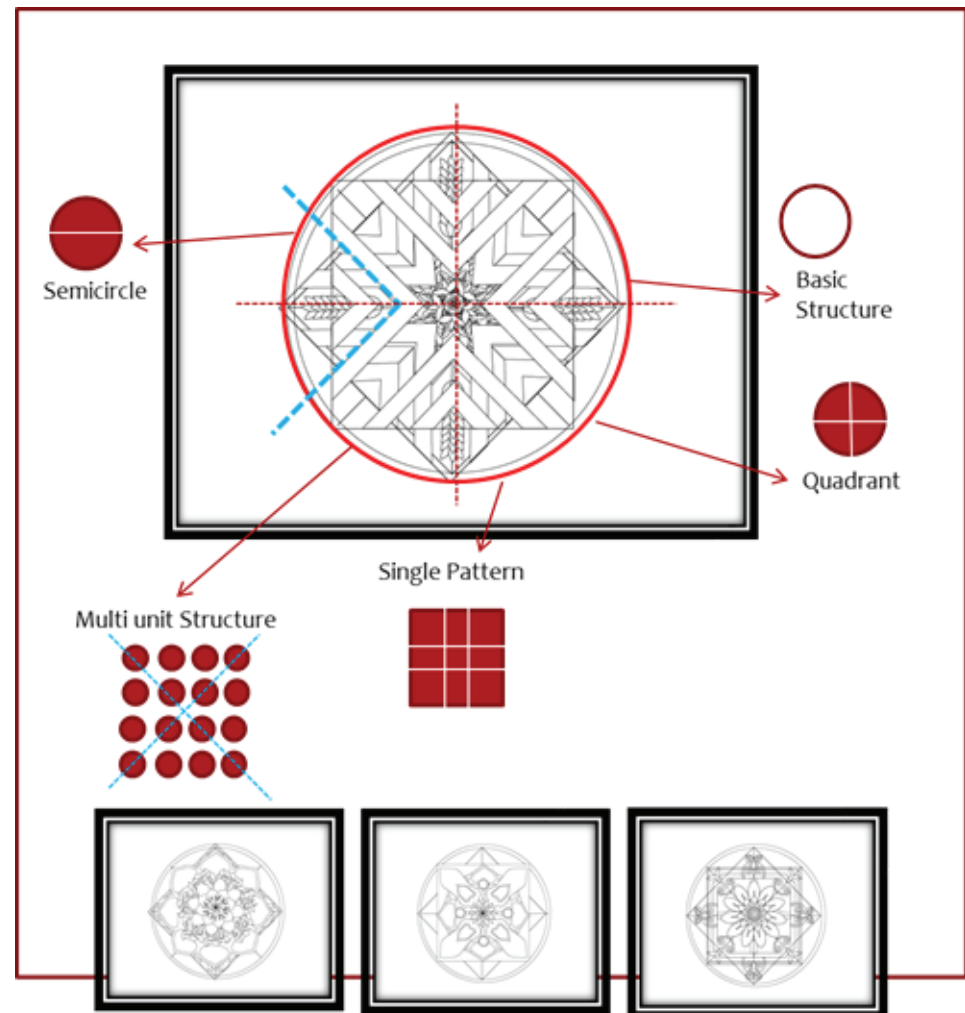


Figure 1: The Structure of Malay Woodcarving Motifs

7. Pattern

The most important thing in woodcarving art is during the early stage when the motif is drawn. The motif should be decided first by the caretaker [8]. Beforehand, the sculptor would make a rough sketch using Ibu motif as a fundamental motif due to its purpose to control the remaining space. At the centre of the sketch, Ibu motif is usually drawn bolder and more outstanding than other sketches. The grid should be painted or make symmetrical axes by the caretaker before proceeding to draw stages. This is crucial to balance the motifs on the woodcarvings design.

Symmetrical axial sketches are often used in traditional Malay woodcarvings to divide the four divisions [9]. After Ibu motif is complete, a stick or a sash needs to be created by the artist while referring to the principles set in the cloud design. Once the rough sketch is done, the sculptor should shorten the sketch using a pencil or pen. Make sure that no existing elements lapse between each motif and have the same comparability.

Up next, the sculptor would use tracing paper to create a carbon copy of the design onto the surface of the wood at the same time ensuring the motif is well balanced. Six elements such as stems, leaves, flowers fungus or fruit, shoots and sower should be seen in each Larutan cloud design. In addition, Boley designs can be added to the woodcarving sketch and add in patterns such as flower, leaf veins, carer and sweeteners. Each element holds a unique function making it capable to increase the versatility of wood carvings thus making it appear more real and prominent. Once the layout of motifs is done, attach it to the wood surface to ease the carving process later on.

8. Color

The use of multiple colours in woodcarving is not a common thing. Mainly to attain the authenticity and uniqueness of the wood used. Most of the time, a fairly thin filing layer were applied which can protect the wood from external damage while increasing its cosmetic values. Different wood colours such as brown, dark brown and white existed in the galleries. The appealing wood colours can further be enhanced by the engraving carved.

9. Woodcarving Process

To make a beautiful and neat woodcarvings, there are five vital steps needs to be followed. The first step is woodcarver should pick appropriate wood for carving. Jelutong, temples and cengal wood are one of the popular woods for woodcarving and Cengal wood stands as the best wood due to its different nature compared to other woods.

The second steps is all about pattern sketching where the pattern either sketched on the paper or straight away on the wood surface. The types of patterns and motifs that is going to be carved should be first identified by the carver. Before the carving process started, a complete motif is made from the carving pattern. The pattern produced needs to obey philosophy and principles used in Malay woodcarving art.

Machinery is the third steps of the process. The machine is often used by the sculptor to create a specific part or to remove any unwanted part. Woodcarvers opt to use various types of machines such as scroll saw, drills and jigsaw to create a translucent engraving. Other than that, the router type of machines used by sculptors to manifest arched carvings. The uses of the machine assure that the wood surface would be evenly distributed among all parts that became the site of their engraving.

The next steps are engraving or shining of the wood. The sculptors produced the shiny rating or engraving as a branch of engraving technique. Silat Belah Rotan, Silat Sodok, Silat Minangkabau, Silat Dada Tuma, Silat Leper and Silat Bunuh Juring is the various styles or silat often used by Malay sculptors. Nonetheless, the silat produced heavily influenced by the society culture especially as can be seen from the motif of woodcarving.

Lastly, the final steps are the packaging stage. Applying finishing is the final step to enhance its cosmetic values. In order to keep the product in good condition while maintaining its gratuitous, packaging stage is the final touch every product needs. For finishing, the wood surface requires wiping rolls to protect it from the moisture. As a plus, it will enhance a bunch of carved wood together and its colours.

10. Recommendation

Malay wood carving art should be preserved so it can be a legacy for future generations. Although the motifs are changes the age circulation, the motifs back in those days should be etched because it is part of Malay culture. To achieve this, all parties should work in synergy to conserve a part of Malay heritage.

Studies have shown that the current generation is less interested in woodcarving art due to a lack of exposure when they were younger. This ignorance has caused Malay woodcarving art on the verge of losing its identity. To sustain the art, it should be nurtured from childhood. It might be able to sparks interest in them in mastering the technique to produce such exotic arts.

Governments, non-government organization, clubs and individuals needed to join had to conserve the Malay heritage arts. Every legacy should possess its own identity of liberty. With this, the community would be able to indulge the implicit messages or advice coming from the carved motifs.

11. Conclusion

The Malay woodcarving art definitely substantial with heritage and philosophy manifest in every motive [10]. Elder people prefer to use figurative language rather than direct advice with each word have implicit meaning [11]. In the woodcarving context, knowledge and advice were convey by the wood carvers in the form of woodcarving by publicly showing it to make them dissect the motifs and messages on their own. Even if our technology is having rapid development, one should not forget one tradition or

inheritance that's left behind. Malay Legacy should be maintain without failure as it has the potential to grow and be known worldwide.

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