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Types of Floral Motifs and Patterns of Malay Woodcarving in Kelantan and Terengganu

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Abstract

For the past four decades, there has been a plethora of research on Malay woodcarving and the preservation of the indigenous traditions, designs, methods and the origin of this woodcarving. The aim of this paper is to present an analysis of 32 carved components from 1840s to 2000s focusing on floral motifs and patterns. This study measured the design attributes of carving motifs including floral design elements, character design elements, compositional pattern, principle design and form. The results suggested that the types of motifs and patterns of carving determine the transformation of floral designs which were influenced by functions, environments and socio-cultural aspects of Malay society.

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Keywords: Malay woodcarving; traditional architecture; carved component; floral motifs

1. Introduction

Before the arrival of Islam, there was a keen interest in the traditional art of Malay woodcarving (Raja Fuziah and Abdul Rahman, 2000). As early 2nd Century AD, the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia had already been a port of call for traders travelling between India and Far East. Thus, it led to greater civilizations, as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam were introduced into Malay society through these traders (Mohd Nor and Siti Fatahiyah, 2010). Architectural elements were designed intentionally to facilitate and express the respect for Malay culture (Abdul Halim and Wan Hashim, 1986; Jenkins, 2010) through the

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design structure of ornamentation serving as a symbol of high social status of a community (Norhaiza, 2009) and these remained as prominent decorative elements in palaces and homes of wealthy Malays (Zumahiran and Ismail, 2008).

The origin of motif in Malay woodcarving in the Malay Archipelago may date back from the days of the pre-Islamic era that when the Malays were practising Hinduism and Buddhism. The motifs are Kala Makara, Gunung, Stupa, Garuda and Naga (Farish and Khoo, 2003). With the arrival of Islam, these motifs were altered in accordance with the requirements of Islam with the arrival of Islam at the end 13th Century (Rosnawati, 2005; Norhaiza, 2009). Most of the carvings representing motifs of Kala and Makara were transformed into floral elements. The transformations were also influenced by the craftsman's skill, natural elements, and religious belief and thought (Abdul Halim Nasir and Wan Hashim, 1996; (Zumahiran and Ismail, 2008). Inasmuch as, Lim (1987) found that woodcarving has been depicted in architectural elements in terms of traditional Malay architecture buildings including mosques, palaces, houses and institutional building since the 18th Century.

Malay woodcarving is a traditional ornamental art manifesting the local traditions and customs which should be kept and preserved especially at the age of increasing rate of urbanisation in Malaysia. With this urbanisation, there has been a trend of modern Malay houses or buildings being built, or older houses renovated using non-traditional elements and building components due to the current technological improvement. The application of woodcarving has lost much of its prominence in modern architectural buildings (Mohamad Tajuddin, 2006; Zumahiran and Ismail, 2008). In this study, therefore, investigates the types of motif and design pattern on 32 carved components of Malay architecture built during the period of 1840s until 2000s. The buildings are old palaces, mosques, houses and institutional buildings. The variables of this study were the period when the components were carved, whom they belonged to, whom the creator was and where they were located.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Philosophy of Malay woodcarving*

After the establishment of Islam civilization in the Malay Peninsula especially in Kelantan and Terengganu, the value of aesthetic became the philosophy in creating the beautiful woodcarving. This value was followed by several different attitudes as such patience, determination, creativity, artistry value, sensibility and technical skill. All these values can be seen in the most talented craftsmen who produced masterpieces mostly inspired by nature (Norhaiza, 2009; Ismail, 2002). Inasmuch as, Ismail (2002) and Farish and Khoo (2003) found that craftsmen's etiquettes played an influential and significant role in their feelings when producing the best quality of woodcarving designs.

As key motifs originated from Hindu-Buddhism with important symbolic meanings in their context, so did the concept of a flower since early Malay life tradition in Malay '*Bunga*', has been used to express the physical beauty of a Malay young girl. This is also seen in the aesthetic use of flowering shrubs and trees in the Malay landscape planted as decoration for the houses (Norhaiza, 2009). Apart from the traditions of Malay life, *Bunga* is applied in Malay art, as the most meaningful of the motifs and patterns depicted on carved components. Zumahiran and Ismail (2010) concurred that the most dominant motif depicted on various carving is that of floral motifs.

2.2. *The origin Malay motif of Langkasuka*

Langkasuka was founded early in the 2nd Century AD, the first Malay Kingdom located in the neighborhood of modern Pattani (Zamberi, 2009). One of the capital cities of the kingdom has been

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