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## ENHANCEMENT WOOD CARVING IN PRODUCING PREMIUM PRODUCT

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### Abstract:

Engraving is a process of sculpting, carving and scratching a pattern. In ancient times the art of wood carving became a symbol of status of noble and courtiers. According to Halim Nasir (1986) the courtiers and sultans became patrons to revive the glory of wood carving. This shows that wood carving is high dignity. The Malays emphasizes every work of art and is designed by the soul attempts to communicate with the public in feel, thinking and interpretations, (Nazzri, 2016). However, the price of traditional wood carving product is too high and difficult to educate the public to love wood carving products. The discrepancy between the two modern and traditional industries makes the development of sculpture difficult to compete with modern products. Besides that, wood carving is also used at will in its placement in the design. This study will lead to several main objectives among which is to know the issues faced by these two industries and know the correct placement of carving in the design so as not to violate its philosophy and ethics. Methodology of the study is using interview data and ethnography with master craft. This research and development will involve ten members of timber manufacturing company around Malaysia which is from modern and traditional timber product companies. This research was conducted for 5 days from 14<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> October 2020 in Temerloh, Pahang. Through this research found three mains issue they facing in order to preserve the wood carving and culture in product and design. The traditional wood carving can be applied on furniture or equipment and preserve the philosophy trough educate the modern practitioner and involvement of 'pandai kayu'. The application of heritage in the first phase is very important so that it reaches the community indirectly and is not considered outdated.

**Keywords:**

Wood Carving, Malay Tradition, Entrepreneur, Contemporary

**Introduction**

Wood carving is a national heritage left by the previous society that emphasizes customs and culture. In Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Edisi ke-2 states that carving is sculpting, scratching and drawing. This means that the art of wood carving will go through a process where the wood will be carved so that a pattern appears on the surface. According to Nazzri Ahmad (2001) states that each of these carving techniques will produce a painting or drawing that is concave, convex or submerged embossed. Wood carving is categorized as a relic of a formed artistic heritage which is also known as fine art. The art of sculpture exists in three- and two -dimensional forms on equipment surrounding community life such as weapons, home construction and everyday tools. As stated by Mohd, Affandi Yahya (1995) in his book '*Simbolisme dalam Senibina Melayu Kelantan*', wood carving is part of the handicrafts that exist along with art and design. He also explained that the art of sculpture was not created for the use of daily items only, but something more important in fact through this art of sculpture is expressing the philosophy and beliefs of a certain group of people. According to Mohd Taib (1997) states that this carving process requires sharp tools to produce patterns with a specific composition. This thing is also meant to highlight its beauty and devotion to the Creator which is shared with the community.

From time immemorial a person's knowledge or advantage to produce works of art has gained a special place. They are called '*pandai*'. For example, a person's skill to make various types of carvings is called '*pandai kayu*' and they are endowed with privileges. This is because for those who have this skill it is a necessary in royal palaces. At the time of the Malay's Royal, carved in the castle is a work of art that has a very high value and it is not surprising figure sculptors of the era invitation acclaimed and respected (W.G. Shellabear, 1983). Every effort to understand the art of sculpture will lead to an explanation of the height of knowledge and civilization that a nation possesses. This view is in line with the perception of Karl Marx who stated that human consciousness is determined by its social civilization (Peter L.Berger, 1991).

Carvings are made using special tools depending on the material used. The manufacture of wood carving products in Malaysia usually uses some important equipment such as chisels, ganden and knives. According to an interview with Zakaria Daut (2020) state that the art of carving a Malay Malaysia and Indonesia is distinguished on finishing the process of carving made. Malaysian sculptors will use '*Pisau Wali*' (knives) to create tones on the surface of their sculptures. This technique works to give a touch of softness and melody to the pattern. Yusrizam Yahya (2020) argues that the use of CNC and laser machines is not the art of carving and is categorized as the art of cutting. This is because the depth and movement of patterns are even and not rhythmic. Therefore the price of this cutting art is much lower than manual wood carving. For example visual art is produced by manual painting and compared to painting produced through prints. Printed drawings can be produced in large quantities with very low price and can be made by anyone.

***Problem Statement and Objective***

Problems encountered in the design and manufacturing industry of wood products when there has been a conflict between these two industries in effort to uphold the local culture and arts.

understanding of the two branches in a timber industry that is between traditional and modern in producing products based on Malaysian culture has resulted in wood carving is no longer the main medium in home design and interior decoration. Wood carvings will be considered too expensive and outdated so that consumers prefer designs that tend to western countries which are considered more up-to-date. According to Muhaimin Hasbollah (2020) the production of local products faces fierce competition with foreign countries so that many of our designers and manufacturers are forced to follow their designs. According to him, traditional craftsmen also need to be exposed to modern manufacturing techniques in order to produce quality products in a faster time. Carving products had to be sold at a high price because the time taken to produce a product was very long and had to cover the daily life of the craftsman. Among other problems is when the occurrence of the use of wood carving and its philosophy produced in the design with careless knowledge. This will cause the wood carving design to no longer function to educate the community and lose its soul. According to Yusnizam Yahya (2020) the use of carving patterns and the production of contemporary products by modern designers and practitioners does not delve into the important content of his philosophy. Pattern designs are only produced by imitating from expert craftsmen's carvings and are not placed correctly. This would be considered a violation of manners and ethics in sculpture.

This study will emphasize several main objectives which are:

- i. To identify issues faced by both timber industries in producing modern products those have a Malaysian cultural identity.
- ii. To learn the philosophical emphasis in wood carving.
- iii. To knowing the right placement of carving elements and product design that can be used as examples.

### **History of Wood Carving**

The art of sculpture has started since hundreds of years ago in Malaysia. Wood carvings are used as symbols for nobles and kings. The courtiers act as the ones that evoke the glory of this art (Halim Nasir, 1986). The development of this sculpture also symbolizes the cultural and social greatness of the local community. Carvings will be produced from daily use products such as keris and parang up to the architecture on the building. According to Mohamad Mustaffa (1987) stated that in the past carving has been the development of Hindu culture seeps and clash to animism belief in traditional Malay culture. The art of wood carving has expanded to the palaces of kings and the houses of dignitaries, but unfortunately traces of early relics of Hindu cultural influence cannot be found but rather the elements in his carvings.

The development of wood carving began to change after the advent of Islam in Malaysia which was well received and become the community lifestyle. The use of Jawi writings, elements of cosmos and geometry began to permeate in the minds of craftsmen began to be enhanced (Othman Yatim, 1988). In the art of wood carving, elements that contradicted the teachings of Islam began to be slowly abandoned and replaced with more appropriate elements. The symbolism of living beings such as supernatural beings, animals and humans began to be transformed into elements of plants and calligraphy (Nazri Ahmad, 2016).

The glory of carving began when the nobility or king raised the rank of craftsman as a palace artist or as a protector who brought the art to life (Muhamad Affandi Yahya, 1995). At the beginning of the reign of the Malay government, has become a necessity for the government

to stay in the house which is filled with sculpture. Therefore, the kings had their own craftsmen or carvers (carpenters) to decorate the residences. The more carvings the kings owned, the higher their status or rank in the eyes of the people. The sculptors depended entirely on their livelihood by carving as their daily income and they were provided with shelter, clothing, and other facilities close to the palace to appreciate the talents available as well as develop the art of sculpture (Halim Nasir, 1987).

### ***Design Principal, Shape and Form***

Malay wood carving forms coming from four basic principal. Symbolically, this principal consists of stupa, makara, lotus and mountain. This principle has been applied from an understanding of Hinduism adapted through observation and the living environment (Ismail Said, 2002). These elements can be found in a variety of home decoration Malay with varying functions. For example, housing component like buah buton (usually use as newel of stairs) is built by using principal of stupa. The shape of the button fruit is basically generated from the '*bangunan*' that builds in the stupa.

Ismail Said further stated that each form used in the composition of this house carries a certain meaning. The mountains are symbolic to the tree of life and the spirit of the land. It is also symbolized by the shadow of a mountain that symbolizes the height of the status of an individual or society. The makara refers to symbol of cosmology and guardian. Some of wood carver in Pattani and Kelantan believe that makara is sea-monster that guardian the spirit of water. Lotus is referring to purity that located in between *gunungan* and makara. Wood carving on the Malay houses is usually built of some basic forms. The geometrical form that using is coming from basic shape in art, which is circle, rectangular, square and triangle. However, these sculptural need to maintain the reflection of the elements on at least two identical sides. Apart from that, the carvings are generally made in symmetrical and at least gone through the one axis (Ismail Said, 2001). Some of wood carvers believe that reflection of shape is symbolic from the unseen world.

The application of philosophy in sculpture is formed through several concepts of the frame of mind. Folklore or mythical beliefs are built on the basis of educating and teaching the next generation. Some of the stories have gone through real events in the past however there is no medium recorded in writing or photographs as real evidence. Additions to the storytelling structure and processing were made based on the appropriateness of the times and the understanding of narrators. In the national education philosophy system enacted in 1992 states that educators need to practice the development of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical concepts in their education system (Mohd. Firdaus and Nasirin Abdillah, 2017). The sculptor of the past who was one of the educators has also used the same concept of thinking. Among the elements of thought revealed for the production of this sculpture are:

1) The concept of intellect:

The sculptor is educated with a logical, creative and innovative style of thinking in the production of his art. Thought made in a mature, rational and conscious state will facilitate the delivery of knowledge made. They also need to strive to benefit knowledge to themselves and the development of society.

2) Spiritual concept:

The nature of belief in God is one of the elements of a philosophy that has been planted in the minds of the Malay craftsmen. This concept is closely related to the soul, the personality and the fact of the creation of the being itself. Only then will the art work that is made really come to life and not be swallowed up by time. Sculptors also need to be aware of the fact of the existence of creators which is in line with the national education system. Every favor given should be appreciated and responsible for maintaining the harmony of the environment and as a caliph in this world.

3) The concept of emotion:

This concept of emotion is closely related to the construction of social relationships in society. Every storytelling in sculpture needs to apply the concepts of patience and control of conduct in creating a harmonious mood. Fostering the nature of love and the spirit of unity in society is able to produce a culture of cooperation and respect for each other.

4) The concept of the physical:

Physical intelligence and the health of the body are things that are closely related to the post-life of human and living beings. The importance of maintaining health is also applied in religious education. Good relationships in society can be forged harmoniously if the body is in good condition.

## Methodology

Two methods were used to make this study successful. The first method which is an interview with several professional craftsmen among them is Muhaimin Hasbollah (Pahang), Zakaria Daut and Zarir Abdullah (Terengganu) and Yusnizam Yahya (Pulau Pinang). In addition this study also involves the method of ethnography on two figures in wood carving. One of them is Muhaimin Hasbollah. He carries the title of Adiguru (Master Craftsmen) and experts in the production of contemporary products by inject the philosophy and wood carving in modern design. Muhaimin is a former wood carver student of the famous wood carver, Latif Long who was one of the previous Adiguru. The other is Yusnizam Yahya who is a skilled craftsman of 'pandai ukir halus' (fine wood carver). Yusnizam is also one of the students and comrades -in-arms of the famous sculptor's Norhaiza Nordin and Nik Rashidin.

## Case Study

The study was conducted for five days starting from 14th to 18th October 2020 with the title 'Pembangunan Aplikasi Ukiran Kayu Dalam Pembuatan Produk Premium Berasaskan Ukiran' (Development of Wood Carving Applications in the Manufacture of Premium Products Based on Carving). This study was run in Inakraf, Temerloh, Pahang and conducted by Muhaimin Hasbollah itself. The program was attended by 10 experts from 10 wood-based products manufacturing companies throughout Malaysia and selected by Malaysian Timber Industry Berhad (MTIB). This program is fully sponsored by MTIB to carry the mission of educating the production of premium wood products and how to preserve the culture.

## Main Results

The production of wood-based products and designs is now more oriented towards western countries by bringing in minimalist and modern concepts. The concept of traditional design is now considered outdated. Wood products also have a very high value so that the community



itself cannot afford to own. So, some people will lose interest in delving into this heritage asset. These concerns have brought a new space of discussion to find a solution so that this heritage art continues to be preserved in the future.

The results of the research in this study found that there are three major problems to develop the art of sculpture in product manufacturing and modern architecture. One of the first challenges faced is the split in the industry between modern and traditional. Practitioners of modern design and manufacturing will be more inclined to delve into the technology and innovation of western products as they are considered more easily marketable with affordable price offerings. On the other hand, traditional artisans believe that the heritage art they bring cannot be mixed with modern products. The art they bring is also of high value and society has to pay a high price. Collaboration between these two fields of craftsmanship can generate new ideas by producing modern products by incorporating traditional concepts correctly.

The second challenge is the technology used in the manufacture of products. The design process made in a product or building must look up from several important aspects such as the expertise of the craftsman, the limitations of the materials and equipment to be used. Neither the raw materials nor the equipment used will influence the overall design. The manufacture of modern products and furniture will usually be assisted by sophisticated machinery in order to cope with the demand from the market. However, the manufacture of traditional products still uses a lot of hand tools. This limits the production rate and market of the product so that the product has to be sold at a high price to meet the daily needs of the craftsman. The combination of these two technologies and body of knowledge can produce modern products that are injected with the concept of tradition and built-in mass production. MTIB also hope at the time was to export products carving of Malay cultural heritage to the world.

Another major challenge faced is the market value of traditional products made and how they are able to compete with modern products that offer lower prices. This competition is not intended to prove that modern products are of no quality and useless. But the real purpose is to attract the interest of the Malaysian community to know and deepen the philosophical aspects and heritage of their ancestors. It can also cultivate a sense of love for their culture by using heritage products in their daily activities. This widespread use will eliminate the embarrassment of using heritage products that are considered outdated.

### ***Philosophy in Malay Wood Carving***

In carving, there are various teaching and educational stories that can be told. Through an interview with Zakaria Daut (2020) found that the art of sculpture is one of the techniques of knowledge delivery and preaching that is made subtly. Islamic knowledge cannot be forced into everyone's soul. The education provided through this art will indirectly attract the interest of fans to delve into the literal and implicit content in it. Therefore, craftsmen usually need to master the knowledge and understanding in detail before it is presented to the community. The production of sculptures that only emphasize the aspect of visual beauty is detrimental to all parties. Thus, sculpture education will usually go directly with understanding and comprehension in each element created. Then the value of a sculpture truly blooms. According to Othman Yatim (2000), Wan Su stating that any sculptor would assume two responsibilities in each work of art is created. That is the message of Islam and tells how to live in a society that is harmonious. The philosophy of the art of carving usually needs to be submitted with the clear and smooth purpose. The Malays nature is meek with polite words should rebuke his

society prudently. Therefore, every work of art made from this soul must conceal various lessons to be conveyed.

### ***Layout of Traditional Elements in Modern Products***

The production of this technique has actually long been applied in product architecture and design. But this contemporary concept is not digested properly so that the Malaysian society itself becomes vague on the philosophy in every sculpture produced. Modern designers will usually place elements of tradition in a design without understanding the terms, origins and philosophies inherent in the sculpture. They do this on the grounds of the aesthetic value and beauty of its visual design alone. The spirit of the wood and the soul that should have taken precedence were not taken into account. Therefore, the education that is to be conveyed through this wood carving design does not reach the community until it partially loses respect for this heritage art.

Understanding layout concept in carving of architecture in Malay house is the first step before studying philosophy and manners. Through this study, it was found that in wood carving, each part will return to the basics of the human body which is head, body and legs. Each section is also located on the roof of Malay tradition building, body and column of the house. Then this basic form is broken down into the decorative focus of the sculpture, among which are:

#### Roof /Head:

- i. Tebar layar
- ii. Papan pemeleh
- iii. Papan cantk
- iv. Kepala cicak
- v. Buah buton dan tunjuk langit

#### Wall /Body:

- i. Siku keluang
- ii. Opening on doors or windows
- iii. Kerawang and jerejak
- iv. Kekisi and tetupao
- v. Floor level
- vi. Bendul pintu

#### Column /Leg:

- i. Stair
- ii. Column
- iii. Stump (kasut)

However, usually craftsmen need to delve into the local architecture to build the identity of the product. This is because some of these elements are only found in certain areas such as *pemeleh* found on the roofs of traditional houses in Kelantan and Terengganu are not the same as *pemeleh* boards in other areas. The placement of these elements must be taken care of so as not to lose its function and philosophy to the community. In the manufacture of the product, it is not too detailed like the construction of a house so that all the elements must be required in the item. But the function and position of the product must be aligned with the placement of sculptural elements on the house.

Each element used must be maintained in its position in the production of the product. *Tunjuk langit* or *buah buton* which refers to the streaked wood on the roof of the house should not be placed at the feet on the product. This is because philosophically this show of the sky is symbolic of gratitude to God. According to Abdullah Mohamed (1985) states that this '*buah buton*' is symbolic to the level of reality and the blank part above symbolizes the power of Allah which cannot be described in its greatness. The symbol of guardian like '*siku kluang*' should locate on the proper place.



**Figure 1: Buah Buton with Using the Concept of Stupa Place on Top of The Plywood Box And '*Siku Kluang*' Located on The Upper Corner of The Box.**

#### ***A Combination of Modern Products with Elements of Tradition***

The production of contemporary products can indirectly open public interest and introduction to traditional sculpture. Materials such as plywood boards with grafting using glue and nails allow these products to be produced in larger quantities in a shorter period of time. Wood grafts made as if using *tanggam* is also one of the techniques that can change the value of a product. This eye trick technique aims to simplify the work of manufacture but does not eliminate the heritage art itself.



**Figure 2: Sample of Cheat '*Tanggam*' Apply on Deposit Box**

Therefore, a deep understanding of the layout and philosophy of this sculpture is essential. The meaning to be conveyed does not run away from the real meaning. Only the techniques used are different and more productive. Traditional sculptors don't have to feel offended because



this scam is made because they can also produce the same product using original techniques and sell it at a higher price if that satisfies its customers.



**Figure 3: Modern Products such as Letter Holders Bind the Elements of Traditional In Them**

In figure 4 also shown that the placement of carving element in modern product followed the rules of Malay's *carving philosophy*. *Buah buton and tebar layar* on top of product and followed by *kerawang* as a wall and stump as a leg. Wood carvers produce the carving and modern production makers can produce product bases. Filigree will be pricked to the product using special glue or nails. The finishing process such as removing the effect of nails should be done to make it appear as if the filigree produced is made from the same base and not pasted. Skills of final finishing techniques such as lacquer spraying need to be done with proper technique.



**Figure 4: Carving Will Be Pasted on The Modern Product to Highlight The Malay Culture**

### Conclusion

The combination of traditional elements in modern products will indirectly breathe new life into the heritage art of local wood carving. Engraving products can be widely used by the community without having to feel outdated. Innovation in the production of this product can also attract the community to dig deeper on inheritance and indirectly re-dignify the local sculptors. The absence of the involvement of skilled people such as traditional sculptors in these contemporary products will result in the loss of the original function and philosophy of

the sculpture. In addition, sculptors who have been plagued with the problem of producing high quality products at expensive prices that are difficult to sell can be solved. In conclusion this study should be continued in a larger scale such as the production of furniture and design elements on the house. Not impossible if one day the concept of a traditional Malay decoration can be loved by people of Malaysia and proudly travel around the world.

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