

Wood Carving- Traditional Art of Malaysia to be a Safeguard and Protected

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ABSTRACT

The protection of traditional crafts represents one of the goals of Intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded, as defined in the UNESCO 2003 Convention. In the field of architecture, traditional carving is embodied in construction techniques in the interior decoration and ornamentation of historic buildings. The architectural and artistic value of the historic objects means protection of their intangible aspect which is to be kept and nurtured for future generations. Wood carving has been an important craft in the dialect architecture practiced by Malay craftsmen in Peninsular Malaysia as early as the 14th century. One of the famous components or items in the vernacular buildings are an ornamental component and it is prominent in traditional buildings. The Carved component also found one of elements with architectural identity for traditional houses in the northeastern region of Peninsular Malaysia. Today the methods are changing regarding the traditional ways of carving the wooden pieces and increased changes in building technology. The knowledge of the local crafts is broadly forgotten regarding the traditional methods for the new generation of wood carvers. Thorough knowledge of the old local ornaments which are applied in the craft, the conservation methodology of the carving which consists of the use of traditional ornaments, means conveying of the traditional methods to the new generation of craftsmen. Nurturing the traditional way of woodcarving represents one integrated process of transferring the skills of the craft as human art and part of the traditional architecture.

Keywords: wood carving, Safeguarding, protection, historic buildings

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional architecture in a historic environment, in addition to the local way of building and implementation of building materials, includes implementation of certain craft techniques in the field of folk art. The creation of carved pieces as part of the interior represents a tradition that lasts for centuries on the territory of Malaysia. The skills of the craftsmen, despite their mastery to form the objects with the use of local materials (stone, wood, processed earth), are oriented towards the use of local craft techniques. In the contemporary building, with the entirely new concept for building technology, they are directly connected with the traditional way of applying the experiences of the builders and craftsmen who conveyed their skills for generations in a certain environment.

The artistic aspect of the building creation is confirmed by the application of the carving technique, where the basic material for processing is wood. The challenging work of the carver is seen on a small carved surface on the interior, where all the creativity is seen through his art piece. With the implementation of wood carved pieces in the interior, they are gaining a symbolic significance of bringing life and joy in the new build home.

The protection of the building methods is especially pointed out after the UNESCO convention (UNESCO 2003 Convention) for Intangible cultural heritage, that includes the crafts since 1952 (Japan) and 1962(Korea). The UNESCO convention (2003) for the Safeguarding of the Intangible cultural

heritage includes methods of diverse types of building heritage, which is important for survival and nurturing towards educating and training of the next generations.

THE WOOD CARVING AS A TRADITIONAL ART-CRAFT OF MALAYSIA

Through the history of generating architectural interplanetary, decorating the interior was a test and a finishing touch of the manufacturer and artist, who applied altogether skill and craftsmanship to create the art form of high artistic standards. Application of woodwork in the decoration of interior elements is a tradition arising from the rich heritage of Malaysian people.

The art of wood carving is synonymous with traditional ornamentation practiced by local Malay wood carvers. It should be preserved, especially during this period of urbanization that happens in Malaysia. Wood carving is defined as a formed of art by means of a cut-out technique on a thick board by an exact design motif and diverse depths of cut (Norhaiza 2008; Ismail 2001, 2002, and 2004) posits that wood carving is an art of partly eliminating wood from a panel or a board following exact motifs and guidelines. Hamdzun Haron et.al (2014) stated that wood carving is "an activity to tear off the wood surface by using several types of tools such as carving chisels and knives". Meanwhile, Neha et.al, (2007). wood carving is an art that has a combination of aesthetic with utility in short, wood carving can be defined as an aesthetic work performed according to diverse types of techniques and motifs which are arranged using specific orders and using specific tools based on selected wood and wood carvings are products for utilities with aesthetic elements.

Wood was used as a medium to express thoughts in the arts (Hari 2005). It is commonly used to carve distinct items of households. Woodcarving has been an important craft in the dialect architecture practiced by Malay craftsmen in Peninsular Malaysia as early as the 14th century (Ismail and Ahmad 2001; Fee, 1998). One of the famous components or items in the vernacular buildings are the ornamental component and it is prominent in traditional buildings. The Carved component also found one of elements with architectural identity for traditional houses in the northeastern region of Peninsular Malaysia (Zumahiran and Ismail 2010). In Malay traditional houses, there are several basic carving components that are commonly used. The basic carving component has been classified into three types which are a single pattern (pola bujang), frame pattern (pola pemedang) and a complete pattern (pola lengkap) (Abdul 1987; Muhammad 1995; Nor 2002; Zumahiran and Ismail 2011; Ruzaika 2013). Meanwhile, the basic carving components are classified into three types which are a single pattern (pola bujang), frame pattern (pola pemedang) and complete pattern (pola lengkap). Abdul Halim Nasir (1986) had to define a single pattern involved freestyle design while moderate pattern is in a panel form and consist of more than one motif but not too complicated and lastly complete pattern which is a very famous pattern in Malay wood carving that commonly used floral as a motif. Ismail and Ahmad (2001) suggest that the carved components are portrayed in three cut styles; respice, perforated and a mixture of both. According to Muhammad Affandi Yahya (1995, P.108), before the commencement of carving, carvers will consider the motif which will be designed based on the technique that is suitable for the type of wood and the part that is going to be carved.

However, in this modern era, few problems regarding the application of the carving components in new buildings occur as the issues of trying to make any building look modern. These include the absence of skilled craftsmen, problems in maintenance and extra high-priced cost. These issues make carvings seem infrequently remained functional in structures nowadays (Zuraini et.al.2015). According to Tajudin (2006), documentation and research on procedures, placement and meanings of ornaments in Malay heritage buildings from houses to other old traditional types of buildings are very little done. This type of traditional ornamentation that manifested the local tradition should be preserved and kept especially in the modernization eras (suriani and Ismail 2013).

NECESSARY PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING

The building techniques of carving groups are a result of a perfected building technique, adapted to the local conditions, was passed from generation to generation. Besides the need for knowledge of certain skills for the basic elements of the wood carving craft, it represents a result of communication between the craftsmen, their apprentices and the local population, that has an active role of accepting these elements of the study (Vatan 2014).

The craftsmen, at the same time part of the local population, during their work created a group of interested students from which was expected gradually to learn the skills and techniques of the carving craft. This would depend on the interest and creativity of the students that were determined to learn the craft. Because of the attractiveness of the craft, and other conditions like the improvements of the economic situation, certain individuals were actively involved in the study of this craft (Bello 2017).

Due to the nature of learning and mastering the craft, that has the characteristics of creative folk art, the methodology of its mastering is specific. The art of the woodcarving craft is acquired through a lengthy process of a few stages in order the final form to be accomplished. The tradition of passing the craft is possible only by word of mouth, through shows, supervising of the working process in each phase separately, repeating certain procedures under the guidance of the master.

In the process of monitoring, it is necessary the art of wood preparation to be mastered, the state of completely dry wood and the process of getting that phase. The second stage is the preparation of the rough piece of wood, on which is, on which is placed a certain design of the composition in drawing for the creative line to be passed on. Immediately after this is the process of basic carving on the compositional structure, where after several layers and stages is getting the desired depth of carved elements. The final stage is followed by a final adjustment of the elements where a cover is applied for protection of the surface. There are many phases and skills in achieving the final form that meanwhile must be transferred in a practical way.

The relationship between the master and the student must be direct; the student needs to possess a minimum knowledge of materials and certain technical skills to achieve the expectations of the program in optimal time.

In this way the goal is achieved by transferring the carving skills to the students, thereby maintaining and continuing local woodcarving skills.

Protection of Traditional craft

As an urgent measure, it is necessary a direct national protection be implemented. The formation of the separate museum and government agencies is necessary for the purchase of authentic carved objects, their protection and presentation. The envisaged protection should be at all levels, from the purchase of tools, working surfaces, types of wood, purchase of the special foundation in carving as stages of different processing levels, the purchase of finished pieces that are not available except in the private collections of the carvers.

These institutions by way of purchase and participation in certain projects, it's necessary to promote the craft as an ultimate art through workshops, children's educational courses, to maintain it as priority art.

After the establishment of UNESCO in 1959, as a center independent scientific intergovernmental organization which later formed other bodies as ICCROM, ICME, ICOM, ICOMOS, CIDOC I, etc. with a main goal of collecting, coordinating, stimulating scientific methods in the field of conservation, creating conditions for protection and proper treatment of traditional crafts.

In addition to the establishment of access to protection and maintenance of the traditional craft,

where it's treated as an important part of cultural heritage, Malaysian participates in the framework of international organizations under the auspices of UNESCO as a net of Southeast Asian network of ethnographical and social history museums, as in the meaning of documentation of cultural heritage within the organization CIDOC, ICCROM where the priority is given to preventive conservation. In the framework of ICME, the research priority is documentation and protection of traditional architecture, including the interior decoration with the woodcarving decorative craft.

The priority of these projects, supporting the development of education for adults, is the integration of the local population Twinning project (Support to the development of adult education), where besides training for the building crafts are included other traditional crafts.

In recent measured used for promotion of cultural heritage represents the realization of contemporary touristic complexes like a Malaysian village in *cengal* or *jati*, where the wood carving craft is represented among other crafts in the workshops in which all the working phases are presented for wood carved objects in exhibition space with ready pieces placed for touristic commercial purposes.

Local Individuals, Association, New Generation

As part of the preventive care for woodcarving as a heritage which must be preserved for next generations can be implemented in several directions: Encouragement of the old generations of masters that learned the craft in a traditional way, meanwhile considering their experience, age and the level of their involvement in the education of the young population. The tendency of their operation regarding lecturing young people on their own is carried out within their families or friends in their environment. This method is closest to the traditional and for best results because the master-carver on his own determines the student based on his own assessment of inner abilities and basic knowledge, in order higher results to be achieved. This is typical for the environments as the cities that were centers of wood carving as Peninsular Malaysia.

Many of these carvers are forced, because of the tough economic conditions, to produce carved objects with artistic value adopted for commercial use in the market. Meanwhile are, produced standard carved motifs, in a new constellation of layers with small dimensions on which the carved piece is placed and offered to the tourists. In the same process, other objects with the lower level of artistic development are created, as characters from the Islamic religion, motifs of animals, plants, and everything connected with the market demand for tourists. In this way, the young woodcarvers besides their workshops have galleries where they exhibit and offer their broad carved pieces of art.

Forming new forms of presentation of the crafts through annual fairs in the cultural centers of the country, with educational, social and cultural character. In doing so, many craftsmen are gathered to present the craft while gaining some profit through presenting and selling crafted objects. These fairs that promote traditional crafts persisted in the last decade and have remarkable results for the preservation of traditional crafts.

Unusual Ways of Applying the Craft in Tourist and Commercial Use

There are several guidelines for the development of the application of carving as a traditional craft in a contemporary traditional framework for its protection:

Highlighting the importance of reputable individual masters or their families who continue the trade, which is the most direct support for artistic creation considered as autochthonous to its territory. Even though the number of living masters is small, connected through their pieces of art with the highest point in a woodcarving period, this method is the most significant regarding its working methodology.

Project stimulation of young craftsmen who are shaping their own workshops. Their work is based on traditional techniques and application of materials and tools, aspiring in a traditional way to shape their style and develop it in that direction. Additionally, they produce commercial objects as house decoration objects with religious themes, etc., which meets a tourist demand and allows survival of the craft in contemporary conditions.

Less significant is the emergence of independent engravers who are self-taught and with a small number of lessons by the master carvers or alone are mastering the art of carving and exist on the carving market. In some aspect they are important for the popularization and promotion of the wood carving craft, to be affirmed in modern terms by advanced sculptural processing. Due to the inferior quality of artistic level, in a way, it has a negative effect on the promotion and protection of the enduring craft values. However, the number of artisans in this group is important because of the need for contemporary implementation of certain guidelines in the cultural heritage of national interest.

The lowest groups of impact are individuals that as amateurs are dealing with a certain model of carved objects, that don't have artistic values. These individuals are part of the unofficial number of people that due to the economic survival are forced to deal with this craft, but with low artistic and craft values.

The negative occurrence in the way of producing means the appearance of machinery methods for obtaining certain motifs having dubious quality therefore, belongs more to the industrial methods of obtaining decorations without classification of art elements.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The significance of nurturing a wood carving tradition is a priority for official institutions dealing with conservation, documentation and studies of crafts and in general the entire cultural heritage.

The cooperation of the local population with the official institutions is required, where it's necessary the projects be nurtured to allow research and transfer of the local craft passed from the masters to the students. The local institutions should have the initiative, as small communities to nurture the expansion of the traditional carving. There are fewer living masters who can pass their knowledge and skill to the new students. It is necessary to preserve the collective memory of this type of artistic value, which carry not only specific identity values from a cultural perspective but also knowledge of the authenticity of the woodcarving craft in this region, as the highest cultural value that should not disappear.

The direction for the maintenance of carving schools or workshops, where many new carving masters are going to maintain the craft, within their professionalism and survival, is the only way to maintain the values of traditional carving.

Establishing a relationship of trust and positive direction within the framework of tourism, where the initiative is stimulating material benefit, represents one form of maintenance, but with several possible negative consequences. It refers to the risk of deforming the quality of the produced samples, their commercial use which can lead to negative effects in terms of holding the carving tradition.

Preserving the traditional technique of production of carved pieces, is part of the urgent goals of state institutions in the field of protection and study of cultural heritage, where only the right direction of its originality in the nurturing quality of the craft can allow its preservation as part of the cultural heritage.

Certain standard methods of working should be established to protect the cultural level of social awareness and raise local interest for the development of national studies in different historical environments within the state. The involvement of certain craft schools and faculties of art will contribute to the conservation approach and the discovery of carving values in the interior, as part of the cultural heritage.

For the significance of the woodcarving as an art craft says its distribution worldwide, presenting tradition with a creative source of indigenous origin.

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FIGURES

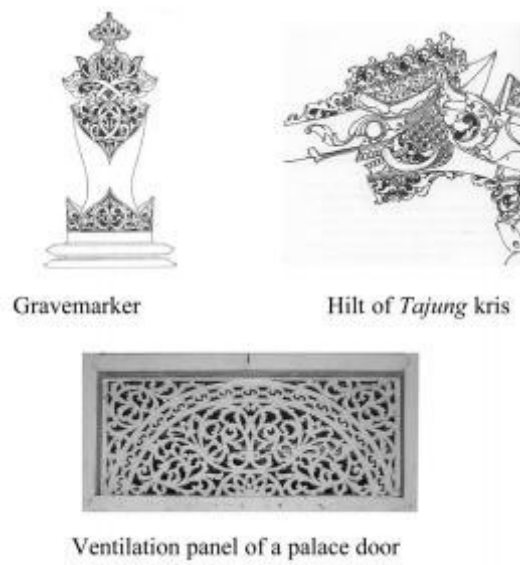


Figure 1 Examples of Malay Woodcarving
(Source: Ismail Said 2005).



Figure 2 Example of The Malay timber houses of Kelantan
(Source: Zumahiran and Ismail Said 2010).