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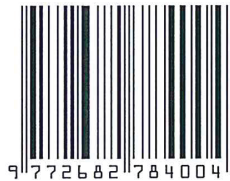
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# TRADITIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ARTEFACTS IN THE SULTANATE PALACE OF MELAKA: THE BENEFITS OF SUSTAINING CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH THE FURNITURE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN RELATED FIELDS IN MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper reports on the first part of an extensive theoretical and empirical investigation of heritage elements in the context of world culture. The main objective of this research is to contribute towards sustaining cultural heritage values, in Malaysia, through furniture design and development process. This research focuses on a study of Melaka's traditional cultural elements in the Sultanate Palace, while being mindful of the growth of modernization in Malaysia. Notably, Malaysia is proud to have a few places listed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. An understanding of the importance of sustaining/maintaining cultural heritage through furniture design is assumed to be broadly related to the thinking and problem-solving methods of designer-makers as reflected overtly in their step-by-step solutions to furniture design problems which incorporate cultural values. A basic research has been carried out to study how an appreciation of historical heritage and traditional cultural furniture elements began in a society. The research methodology applied in this research is based on qualitative methods involving interviews and observations with a relevant group of designer-makers. As description of historical artifacts of the Melaka Sultanate are rarely found in literature, the historical relics of the Melaka Sultanate Palace have been rebuilt from the viewpoint of the literature "Sulalatus Salatin", in order to reminisce on the greatness of Melaka and the uniqueness of the Malay traditional culture in the 15th century. This paper will show that it is possible to incorporate and adapt unique cultural elements into contemporary furniture design; moreover, this outcome will facilitate the building up of reference materials relevant to design education as well as for heritage organization purposes.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malay traditional elements are wide and can be found in the architecture, weapon, craft, foods, martial arts, music tools and lifestyle from past cultural tradition. The Malay traditional elements have been contemplating the beauty of aesthetic cultural value and splendour that has sacred and deep meaning in itself. Traditional element with unique aesthetic value is also able to create a peaceful environment for users by combining the traditional elements to the modern furniture design (Shuaib & Enoch, 2014). To sustain the traditional elements in the modern era, the knowledge and process of learning should be appreciated by the related field. According to Biggs (2014) and cited by (Kumpas-Lenk et al., 2018) the related profession are important roles to designate for understanding the skills, which could result from the expansion of the learning process.

Apart from that, The Sustainable Development Goals by The United Nation has listed seventeen (17) goals for the better of a nation and two (2) of the goals are closely related to this research, namely: for Goals 11(Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goals 4 (Quality Education). Goals 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) has included the protection of natural heritage and world's cultural in the cities. It is because cities are the main place for social development which allow people to advance socially and in productivity. This target is clearly to retain heritage for future generations. Goals 4 (Quality Education) has targeted, that by 2030 the learners need to develop the knowledge and acknowledgement of the cultural diversity and contribution for sustainable development (United Nations, 2018).

In this literature, the researcher will focus on the traditional cultural heritage artefacts in the Sultanate Palace of Melaka. In view of the facts, there are a lot of benefits in sustaining cultural values through furniture design development process. According to Nordin (2017), Melaka has been established as a great history by being the largest entrepot and international trading port. Historical artefacts from the Melaka great are rarely found but the greatness in terms of culture has been written in the literature of "Sulalatus Salatin"(A. S. Ahmad, 1979).

By definition of the benefits of sustaining cultural values through furniture design and development process in Malaysia, this primary study focuses on a particular group of respondent such as curators from specific museums in Malaysia, and practitioner such as designer and design students. The objective of this study is to study about the cultural value of heritage elements in the Melaka Sultanate Palace for the modern society to appreciate and to identify the potential and the advantage of the implementation the unique traditional elements of the Melaka Sultanate Palace for contemporary furniture design and also for heritage organization references and furniture design course.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Heritage Appreciation

An appreciation of heritage as a process has undergone significant changes over a long period of time, leading us to consider factors that include how to sustain and appreciate it and how heritage is an invaluable source of inspiration to furniture design development. Heritage is important and has proven to the backbones of many fields including travel and tourism which is an important factor to drive economic income by domestic and international tourist (Franco & Macdonald, 2018).

According to Ismail and Nadarajah (2016), modern era development has significantly decrease some aged buildings into rubbles. Thus, possess as a predicament to the society especially the youth on their awareness of existing heritage buildings and sites. The success in preservation and maintenance of aged buildings will be achieved by educating, promoting values and a strong sense of appreciation in the younger generation. The younger generation will continue efforts to preserve this heritage as they are the key to determine and decide if a heritage building should be preserved or demolished. Therefore, to ensure continuant on the appreciation of the heritage buildings in the era of modern development, an initiative plan for awareness on the need to preserve this legacy should be carried out. Besides, the social, political and economic factors should also be included in the list of conflicts to retaining and valuing cultural heritage especially when the heritage itself are valued by numerous stakeholder (Bakri et al, 2015).

According to S. N. Harun (2011), the perception of conserving heritage and the heritage building conservation should be sustained because it has its own value. The aim to sustain the heritage in an authentic value has become challenged particularly in the case of decisive conservation (Harun, 2011). He also added on the importance of conserving heritage buildings declared by UNESCO such as George Town and Melaka where both locations has become the main centre of tourist attraction and has a good demand in the list of obligatory places to visit (ibid).



*Figure 1.1: Melaka has been inscribed under UNESCO. Source: from [travelphotographersmagazine.com/unesco-melaka-historic-city-of-the-straits-of-Melaka](http://travelphotographersmagazine.com/unesco-melaka-historic-city-of-the-straits-of-Melaka)*

### **3. TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS**

#### ***3.1 Traditional Element in Architecture***

The traditional elements are usually found in architecture and furniture design. According to Boger (1959) as cited by Wahab et al (2015), the architecture plays the important roles with the interior design, while the furniture reflects the characteristic of the culture and environment. The Malay traditional architecture for example, has been known as in a simple form, practical in assemble with predominant material used is timber (Hanif et al., 2016).

The architecture of the Melaka House can be described and divided into parts which is horizontal or the vertical. Mostly, the Melaka traditional house has several doors and windows and the traditional element of Melaka can be seen through the roof design and also wall carvings decorative and technique. According to Nasir (1982), cited by Wahab et al (2015) each of the Melaka architecture houses can be divided into three parts namely:

- a. Roof Part: Consist the loft (Loteng) area.
- b. Body Part: Consist the porch (Anjung) area, Veranda (Serambi), main house (Rumah Ibu), and other rooms.
- c. Pillar Part: Contained the pillars mounted on stone plinths

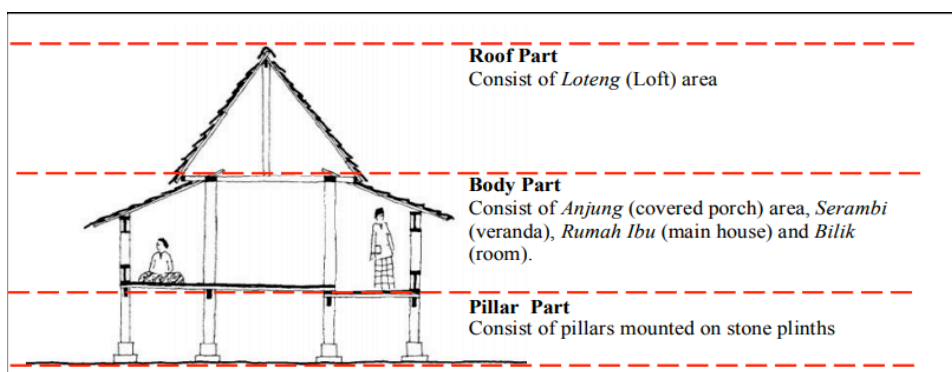


Figure 1.2: The part of Melaka House that has been described in three vertical part.  
Sources by L. J. Yuan (1987) cited by Wahab et al (2015).

In addition to the traditional elements in the Melaka architecture house, the research by Shaffee and Said (2013) as cited by S. Ahmad et al (2015) has stated that the traditional elements of carving are actually a taboo in a palace and usually, predominantly is a craft in a typical house building. The carving motif is mainly designed for the Kings Palace to show the value and the symbol of the status. The carvings made, mostly by the handwork of ordinary people for the decoration (S. Ahmad et al., 2015).

### 3.2 Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum

Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum is a museum located in Melaka, Malaysia. The building is a modern reconstruction of the palace of the sultans of Melaka. It showcases the history of the region. This replica of the original 15th century palace of the Melaka Sultanate is based entirely on descriptions contained in the literature of “Malay history” and has been adapted from the history of “Sulalatus Salatin” Despite its complex structure of 7 enclosed porches and sharp sloping roofs, not a single nail was used in its construction. Inside the building are displayed a series of tableaux recreating the many activities that took place in the palace during the heyday of Melaka Malay Sultanate (Arkib Negara Malaysia, 2018).



Figure 1.3: Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum (2018).

### ***3.3 Traditional Artefacts in Melaka Sultanate Palace***

Special artefacts discovered from the architecture of the Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum are “Tanggap”, roof, roof structure and carving technique. “Tanggap” in the Melaka Sultanate Palace has its own design and is the main special elements in this building which has been implemented in the entirety of the structure. There are many types of “Tanggap” designs in this building. The next special elements of Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum are roof and carving technique. The Malay traditional heritage can be seen through the design of the roof, roof structure and carving.

### ***3.4 Structure and Material***

In traditional design, Malay palaces used to use wood as the base of design. The type of wood that has been regularly used are “Cengal, Resak and Nyatoh”. This Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum has four (4) “Tiang Seri”. The roof has been made from “Berlian” wood from Sarawak which was the layer structure of the roof. The measurement of the roof is 75-meter height and 12.5 metre width. The roof is similar to Minangkabau roof design. Most of the hall has its own detailed carving elements design such as floral and plants.



Figure 1.4: A special traditional element of carving much influenced by the floral in the interior and special traditional element of stairs based on the Melaka Traditional House in Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum (2018)

## 4. CULTURAL VALUE, FURNITURE INDUSTRIES AND FURNITURE DESIGN EDUCATION

### 4.1 Cultural Heritage Value

Malaysia is blessed with a huge heritage culture history in the cities namely, Melaka, George Town, Taiping built during 1511 to 1957 with a variety of influences and architectural styles. The architecture is occasionally known as an identity of the people and the country. There are hundreds of relic buildings from the different ethnic groups such as Chinese, Indian and also indigenous traditional architecture (Sodangi et al., 2014).

To protect the cultural heritage or the preservation of the heritage is extremely important. This is because the interconnection of the heritage with the people, environment and history of the people. The preservation is also to retain the artefacts among the rise of urban development. For example, in the United States of America, heritage protection includes not only traditional building but also urban landscapes. The preservation is made by all parties including the private sector, federal and also local authorities (Prompayuk & Chairattananon, 2016).

Furthermore, sustaining a cultural heritage is not only on physical objects, such as architecture and existing buildings. Cultural heritage includes intangible items such as languages, arts and customs. The preservation of a cultural heritage and other heritage need to be done in all forms as it will attribute to the value of the heritage itself (ibid)

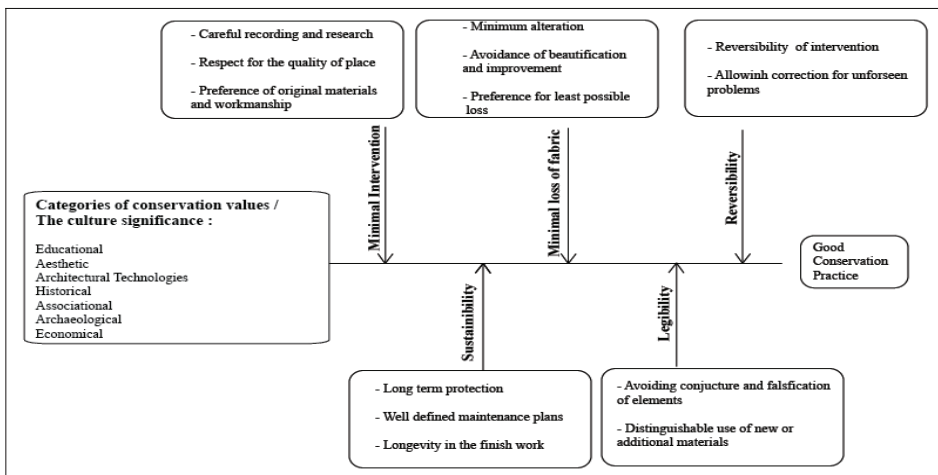


Figure 1.5: A conservation figure suggested from various international charts. Cited from (Mohd-Isa., et al 2011).

### 4.2 Furniture Design Industry

Traditional elements stem from ancient civilization which consists of impressive beauty which is able to deliver certain traditional story from the past. The importance of traditional elements sometimes is overlooked due to modernization and exposure not fully given on the advantage of traditional elements in the furniture design development. As mentioned by Shuang (2018) in China, the

Chinese has a long traditional history of culture and the main issues faced by the modern designer are to combine the modern technology and removing the contemporary element of the traditional culture.

Furthermore, in the furniture design field, with the increase of working millennials who prefer to purchase minimalist furniture design as a choice has occasionally depreciate the value of traditional elements as modern minimalist furniture has vastly taken over interior design. The styles of minimalist is not a new movement and this can be express by Cousins (2015); the minimalist style is based on user trend era where the design are roomy, simple, classy and this naturally creates beautiful elements. Malaysia Furniture Industry export are in high demand and is a good source of national income. As stated in the report by International Furniture Fair 2019 (MIFF), Malaysia has been ranked as a large furniture exporter and has secured this position in a widely global industry of furniture (Malaysian International Furniture Fair, 2017).

The consideration of traditions in the furniture design is an important role to be taken. It is also to visualize the uniqueness of the furniture, to show the culture of people and can also be the direction of furniture design development. The aesthetic of the design will influence the development of the furniture design (Abyzov & Strelets, n.d.)

In 2015, The Star Online interviewed a Malaysian designer who was currently based in China, Philip Yap at the showcase titled *Designing With Malaysian Hardwoods* pointed out that “We want to make designs that has meet the criteria to be sold, and we want to train the students to know the different type of furniture that can be sold and what does not meet the marketability and aesthetics” (The Star Online, 2015). These issues are evident in the furniture industry by following current market trends which are more to the modern and adaptation of international culture. A Malaysian born designer, Philip Yap also added that the furniture he design are mixed with the influences of retro Scandinavian using Malaysian Timber material (ibid). In addition, people who are involved in the furniture design industry are the key to increase the value of traditional elements in a modern furniture design instead of focus in the international culture adaptation. Thus as well as promoting the local furniture market it is also representing the Malaysia heritage to the international level (Malaysia Timber Council, 2017).

### ***4.3 Furniture design education***

The elements of design in furniture are connected with the human life processes. It influences the essential of the environment which create consolation for humans. For a case in Turkey, according to Erzurumluoglu (1991) cited by N. Döngel, et al, (2009), the meaning of design and the influence are partially seen. The outcome shows that designs are commonly being copied, redesigned to accommodate local needs and trends. This is the result in the deficiency of design understanding and also the lack of professionally educated designers which relate to the neglect of design by the manufacturing industry. Furniture design education outcomes have influenced the enjoyment of the industry and also the earnings of the manufacturers, seller and retailers. It is hard to visualize a superior residence without a piece of good furniture or a great furniture industry that can be a competitor in international markets (Döngel et al., 2009).

In the context of furniture design education, the design subjects should be the key to create international and national competitiveness in the future. As the design itself are the important key as the weapon to enhance livelihood and cultural changes of the communities. Thus, the society in the design and related fields such as educationalist, the private sector and also the government should pay more

attention to design education to provide better understanding in design education. (ibid)

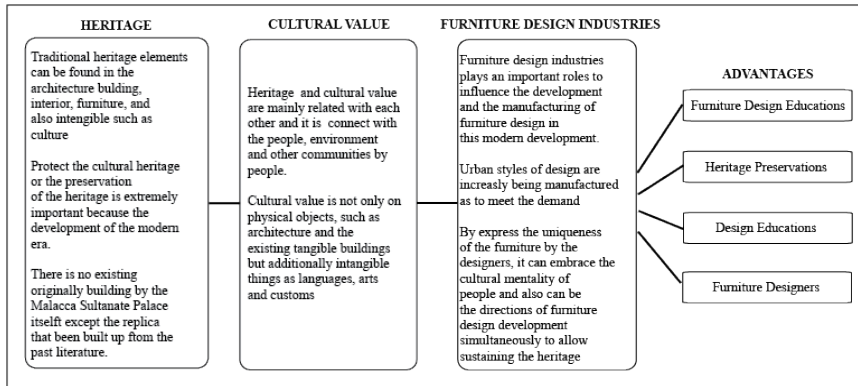


Figure 1.6: A conceptual figure and benefits to the related issues

## 5.0 PRELIMINARY DATA FINDINGS

Preliminary data play an important role for the researcher to obtain initial findings from the sampling. The involved sampling for open ended-interview are Curators from the Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum (Melaka), Department of Melaka Museum (Perzim), Department of Museum Malaysia (KL), and Department of Heritage Malaysia (Melaka).

### 5.1 Preliminary Data Findings

Preliminary data play an important role for the researcher to obtain initial findings from the sampling. The involved sampling for open ended-interview are Curators from the Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum (Melaka), Department of Melaka Museum (Perzim), Department of Museum Malaysia (KL), and Department of Heritage Malaysia (Melaka).

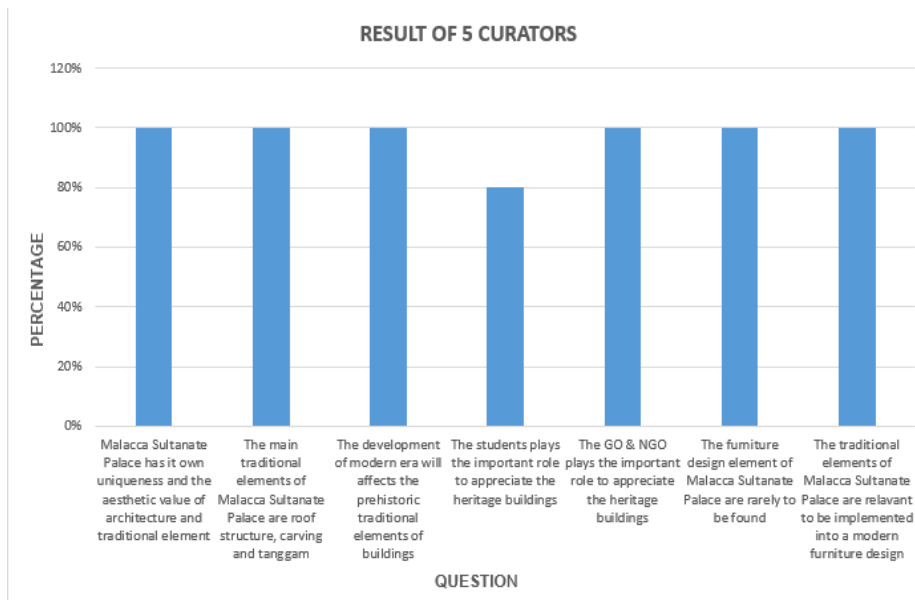
Table 1: The total sampling of the preliminary finding on the reference museums and organization to obtain the importance of the Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum replica

QUESTION	PERBADANAN MUZIUUM MELAKA	JABATAN WARISAN	MUZIUUM NEGARA	MUZIUUM KESULTANAN MELAYU MELAKA
Malacca Sultanate Palace has it own uniqueness and the aesthetic value of architecture and traditional element.	1	1	2	1
The most popular traditional elements are Carving, Roof and <i>Tanggam</i> .	1	1	2	1
The development of modern era will affects the prehistoric traditional elements of buildings.	1	1	2	1
The students plays the important role to appreciate the heritage buildings.	1	1	1	1
The GO & NGO plays the important role to appreciate the heritage buildings.	1	1	2	1
Malacca Sultanate Palace does not have its own furniture design.	1	1	2	1
The architecture and traditional element of Malacca Sultanate Palace are relevant to be implemented into a modern furniture design.	1	1	2	1



A few questions have been asked to the museum curators to obtain opinion and information about the Melaka Sultanate Palace. The curators are from the different museum department but the researcher has been informed that all of these respondents are familiar with the Melaka Sultanate Palace. Some of these curators are involved in the Archeology field. From the result of this preliminary data, Table 1 shows the result derived from the sampling answer. The result that has been taken is based on their experiences as a heritage contributor. Followed by Table 2, the researcher has converted the sampling result into a bar graph to get the percentage of the questions.

*Table 2: The percentage result of the semi-structured interview*



Based on the total data collection from curators, the researcher has come out with a bar chart as to express in the percentage of the total result for the interview questions. The first question, the total of the curators think that the Melaka Sultanate Palace has its own uniqueness and the aesthetic value of traditional element are 100%. All of the curators agreed that the Melaka Sultanate Palace has the special traditional Element. This total percentage also followed by the result of the main traditional elements in Melaka Sultanate Palace which are Roof Structure, Carving, and “Tanggam” jointing in the architecture.

For the result of the data collected from the third question, all curators agreed that the development of the modern era will affect the prehistoric traditional elements in the architecture which is 100% per cent of the result.

In the fourth question, the curator’s viewpoint has decreased to 80% which the remaining of 20% do not support the notion that students do not mainly play as the important role to appreciate heritage buildings but The GOs and the NGOs also need to take part to appreciate heritage buildings. Apart from that, all the respondents collectively agreed that the furniture design elements of the Melaka Sultanate Palace are rarely to be found, at a percentage of 100%.

In the conclusions of this preliminary research, the sampling result agreed that by implementing the traditional elements of the Melaka Sultanate Palace into contemporary furniture design, the Malaysia heritage will be sustained.

## 6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The traditional element design in the Melaka Sultanate Palace is a rare find. The Melaka Sultanate Palace Museum itself is a replica that has been rebuilt from the traditional Malay literature “Sulalatus Salatin” and the only thing to depend on from the past history that shows the symbol of the greatness of the Melaka. Additionally, the element of furniture design with specific influences from the Melaka Sultanate Palace is rarely found.

On the other hand, the researcher hopes by implementing local traditional cultural heritage artefacts in furniture design and development process, the Malaysia heritage could be retained. It also hoped that the findings of this research can contribute to further exposure and research material to the university, design education, museums and other related fields. The findings should promote strong interest in embracing the uniqueness of traditional cultural value elements in the Melaka Sultanate Palace for furniture design development process to be recognised by society at large, heritage organization in Malaysia and also mainly the furniture design industry. This research finding will definitely benefit the Malaysia furniture design market economy in the future.

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