

***Congkak* Variations through Design Transformation**

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ABSTRACT

Congkak is a traditional game brought into the South East Asia by traders in the land of Malacca during the 15th century. It has a total of 14 holes on each side representing 14 “*kampung*” (literally of village) while 2 large holes on the left and right called as “*rumah*” or “house”. The aim of this research was to document the variations of *congkak*'s designs and transformation in the Peninsular Malaysia for the past 50 years. Feldman's theory was used in this study as this theory involved description, analyze, interpretation, and judgment of artworks. The study started with describing the visible characteristic of the *congkak* selected as the sample in this study. Samples were collected from Muzium Negara and Muzium Perbadanan Kraf Kuala Lumpur. Elements such as size, form, material, influential factor, period and color were recorded during this stage. To gain better understanding, interviews with the *congkak* expertise were conducted. The results of the study showed that *congkak* has been transformed by both social and religious influences. Influences from Hinduism's *Garuda* Head and Dragon Head originated from the Buddhism which took place in Malacca and Kedah since the 14th and 15th centuries by the traders from China and Sumatra were significantly found at most of the *congkak* designs. The *Petalamati* bird's head was found to have a significant connection to the nature. The Malays were historically famous for their skills in the sea, lived by the coastal area, during the time where trading was large, has adopted the nature and this has been applied in their life through arts, crafts, and even sports. During this time, *congkak* turned into *sampan* and *perahu* shapes. The game was played among aristocrats before it reaches local people. However the modernization has transformed the design of *congkak* to a portable design, which is more handy and lightweight. Findings from the study concluded that *congkak* needs to be preserved through various means, so as retaining the traditional sense and keeping the traditional game alive so that it can be sustained and valued by the future generation.

Key Words: *congkak*, traditional game, design transformation, Feldman's theory

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Congkak is a traditional game brought into Southeast Asia by traders in the land of Malacca during the 15th century. It has a total of 14 holes on each sides representing 14 “*kampong*” or “village” while two large holes on the left and right called as “*rumah*” or “home”. As time passes and technological advancement takes place, traditional game started losing its popularity. Some of its survived by going through a transformation of design, including the game of *congkak*. Feldman’s theory of art interpretation describes the variation of design found along the epoch. This research will go through the process of data collection, observation, data analysis, and result interpretation. According to Muhammad Husin, Muhammad Zamureen, Mohd Khair Azizi (2010), *congkak* has went through development over the epoch. On the research of Modern *Congkak*, they stated that old *congkak* too heavy and too big to be carried by the user, mainly children. The other problem with the old *congkak* is the color of the *congkak* is the color is too dull and less attractive to be played with children. It looks more like an artifact than a toy. The modern *congkak* is then designed to solve the problems, to be lighter than the old *congkak* and can be separated to make it easier to be carried and stored. The color scheme is changed more striking and attractive colors. This was supported by Ting Sie Bing (1999), the current situation has an impact to the design as a straight wooden block, this traditional game is facing extinction because of changing lifestyles, high labor costs and as a result of environmental issue, then SPM has re-designed the *congkak* board to make it more approaching to the younger generation through the use of high-tech-toxic-free plastic, thus saving trees from being cut down. The need for preserving the heritage and culture has also become a matter of concern especially since the invention of modern games, which become a threat to the traditional games. Abd. Razak Ab. Said, the Chairman of *Jawatankuasa Bertindak Kebudayaan dan Adat Istiadat Melayu* of Negeri Sembilan said;

“Permainan tradisional ini telah menjadi sebahagian daripada kehidupan yang dilalui oleh ibubapa dan nenek moyang kita sewaktu aman kanak-kanak dahulu. Bukan semata-mata mengisi masa lapang tetapi juga satu kaedah pembelajaran, mengasah minda dan belajar menjadi ketua.”
(Utusan, November 13, 2013)

As a result of this cross-cultural, western cultures has influenced negatively especially to the traditional art and cultural activities and emphasizing this cross-cultural issue with the society’s living culture which recently giving much credit to the individualistic status. This type of thinking has consequently lowering the involvement of young generation in the traditional activity. This can be concluded that problems that identified are the rapid changes in technology eroding the original values of traditional games, lack of young generation involvement in traditional games and lack of writing on the development of *congkak* as historical sources for culture identification to the future generation.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

It is of interest in terms of knowledge for society to appreciate the heritage of Malay *congkak* including its form, design, materials and motifs used in *congkak* as our traditional games to enable young people to know clearly about the *congkak* and its importance to generations from the past and can turn on and highlight the form and design of *congkak*, in addition to maintaining our Malay heritage customs and traditions. This study also aims to promote awareness to the present generation of the culture and identity of the Malay traditional games of tradition and the variations for each *congkak*. Indirectly, this research also has an interest in conveying information about the *congkak* variations through design transformation in the production of it. It will explain in more detail about the materials, form, shape, sizes, seed and influence behind the design used in the *congkak*.

2.1 CONGKAK DESIGN TRANSFORMATION

The cultural game has gone through transformation since ancient times. It changes in many ways which some of them turning the game into a totally new look. It has evolved since the day it was played, starting on the ground, moved to a board and the latest version is running on machine platform (Noraziah, Asmidah, Aniza, Muhammad Safwan, 2013). Time passes, modern elements has been included in the Malaysian wood carving which used to inclined towards Islamic principles motifs, geometric, vegetal, and calligraphy. In another advance transformation, a high-tech toxic-free plastic *congkak* with high timber cost and environmental issues caused the company to stopped exporting; hence the new look of *congkak*. It is also an attraction as awareness to environmental issue in the public increasing. These 'new' *congkak* not only made from a new material, but also came with a multi-function characteristic. *Congkak* has been found acquired different types of motif. Cross-cultural and religion background including animism, just like many other Malay craft has also affected *congkak*. To support the statement, the researchers adopted Mohd Taib Osman's idea (1971) that the "Culture usually has characteristics of continuity and change resulting from encounters with foreign influences following the adaption of and addition to what was already in place." The writing also briefly explained on the development of traditional craft in the nineteenth century, particularly in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perak. The craftsmen, who are skilled in many types of craft including woodcarvings, were mostly work and lives in the palace or the residence of great people.

In addition, Siti Zainon Ismail (1989), detailing the types of decorative art motifs in the Malay world that the elements of nature became the source of the Malay decorative art motifs. Wan Hashim Wan Teh (1996), listed out two basic types of popular designs among the Malay carvers which are 'cut-out' design and 'carved in low relief', giving the example of *awan larat* as the common design for the category.

Table 2.1: *List of Congkak Definition and Term*

NAME	ORIGIN	MEANING
<i>Congkak</i>	Malay word	To count mentally
<i>Mancala</i>	Arabic word	To move things about

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Method for this research are using 2 types of data in achieving the objective and analyzing the symbolic meaning. This will comprises of primary and secondary data. There are several *congkak* that have been collected which includes an observation and data collection at Muzium Negara, Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu, Muzium Perbadanan Kraf Kuala Lumpur and toys shop.

An interview with the expertise in *congkak* is crucial for this research. and cover various questions from the time frame of Malaysian *congkak* that focuses on form, shape, material, sizes and motif of ornamentation used by craftsmen at the head of the *congkak*. Data discovered through books, journal and articles. Theories for this research are from the contexts of culture, literature and the concept of design. It can be reviewed through articles and books written by certain authors. In order to get generic ideas about the traditional and contemporary *congkak*, the researchers takes advantage of the Internet to get efficient and reliable information.

3.2 EDMUND BURKE FELDMAN THEORY

This theory is chosen as it aims to find out the type of each form, which is found on the decorations around *congkak*, including on the head, body and influence of it. After that, the meaning of each data obtained will be analyzed to discover the meaning. The selection of this theory will help to assess the content of beauty and aesthetic motifs and patterns available on the *congkak*. Studies related to *congkak* can be seen through the chronological beginning of a bygone era, where *congkak* is used as a traditional games and only used by the upper classes such as kings and nobles. In addition, the facts of history are also important because they also involve relations with the influence and status of the owner.

4.1 DATA COLLECTION

In order to conduct the analysis on the traditional and contemporary *congkak*, each *congkak* comprises of forms, shapes, sizes and materials were selected as the main research items. These *congkak* comes in sets of eight traditional *congkak* and four contemporary *congkak* from the observation at the Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu, Kuala Lumpur, Muzium Perbadanan Kraf Kuala Lumpur and toys shop. The researcher observed the *congkak* forms, shapes sizes and materials before composing an analysis including the motif of the head of the *congkak* and the influences. Analysis of the Malay traditional games starts with the time line of the *congkak* starting from 14th century. Visual data for traditional *congkak* collected from the Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu Kuala Lumpur and Muzium Perbadanan Kraf Kuala Lumpur while for contemporary collected from toys shop. Researcher can concludes from both answers of two respondents, one of them is Raja Suraity Binti Raja Ahmed, a curator from *Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu*, and Mr.Nurul Hadi Bin Muhammad, an officer at *Muzium Kraftangan Bahagian Ukiran Kayu*, about information of *congkak*.

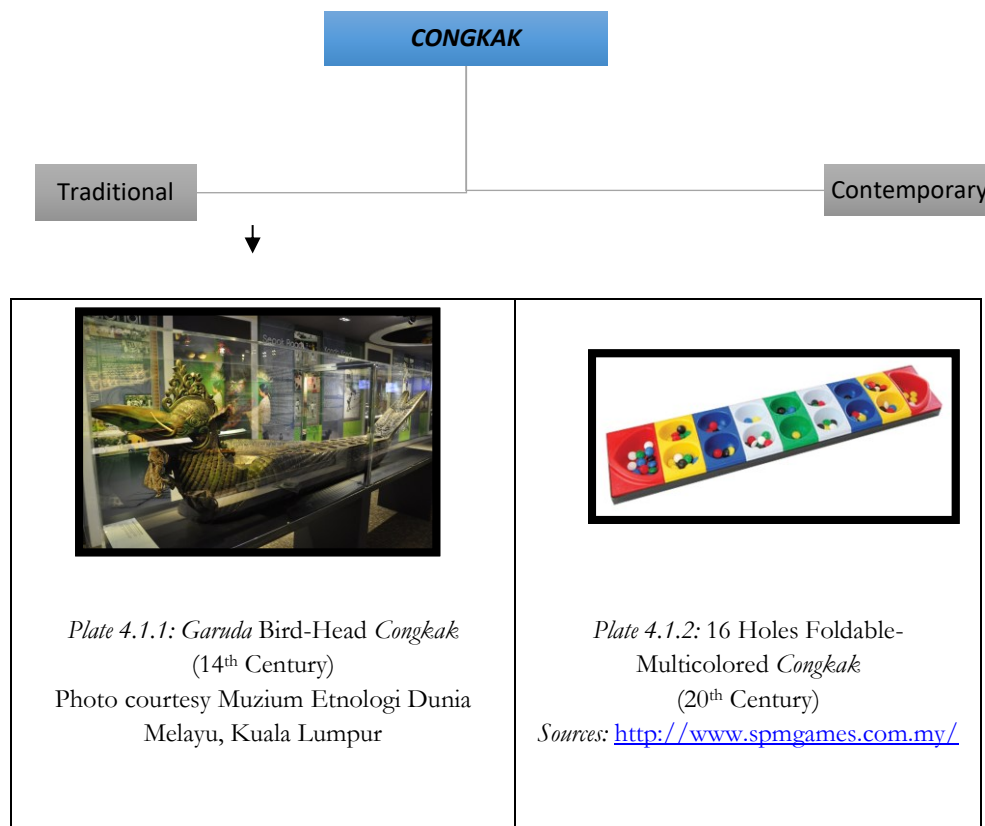




Plate 4.1.4:Dragon-Head Congkak
(14th Century)
Photo courtesy Muzium Etnologi Dunia
Melayu, Kuala Lumpur



Plate 4.1.6:Petalawati Bird Congkak
(15th Century)
Photo courtesy Muzium Etnologi Dunia
Melayu, Kuala Lumpur

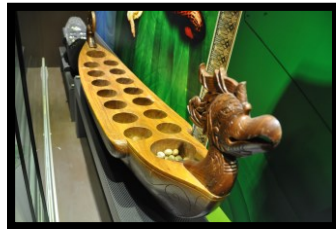


Plate 4.1.8:Petalawati Bird-Head Congkak
(15th Century)
Photo courtesy Muzium Etnologi Dunia
Melayu, Kuala Lumpur



Plate 4.1.5: Junior 12 Holes Congkak (20th
Century)
Sources: <http://www.spmgames.com.my/>



Plate 4.1.7: 16 Holes Gold Congkak (20th
Century)
Sources: <http://www.spmgames.com.my/>



Plate 4.1.9: Foldable Congkak (21st Century)
Photo courtesy from Kayangan Gift,
Kuala Lumpur

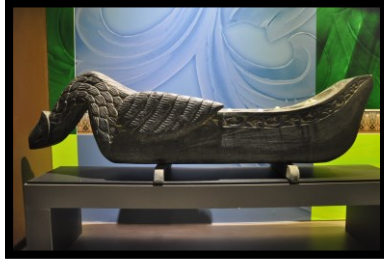


Plate 4.1.10: Sampan Congkak (16th Century)
Photo courtesy Muzium Etnologi Dunia
Melayu, Kuala Lumpur



Plate 4.1.11: Perahu Congkak (16th Century)
Photo courtesy Muzium Etnologi Dunia
Melayu, Kuala Lumpur

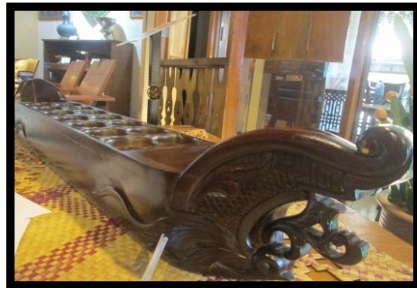


Plate 4.1.12: Carved Boat Congkak 1
(16th Century)
Photo courtesy Muzium Perbadanan
Kemajuan Kraf, Kuala Lumpur.



4.2 FINDING FROM OBSERVATION

Table 4.2:
Congkak Variations Since 14th Century Until 21st Century

YEAR	NAME OF CONGKAK	MATERIAL	FORM	NO. OF HOLE	NO. OF HOME	MOTIF	SEED	COLOR	INFLUENCE
14 th century	<i>Congkak</i> with <i>Garuda</i> Bird Head	Wood	<i>Garuda</i>	2	18	Mythical Bird	Latex seed	Brown	Hindu Buddha
15 th century	Dragon Head <i>Congkak</i>		Dragon		14	Mythical creature	Cowrie shell		Buddha
	<i>Petalawati</i> Bird-Shaped <i>Congkak</i>		<i>Petalawati</i>		18	Mythical bird	<i>Buab goreng</i>	Red, Yellow, Black	Kelantan
	<i>Congkak</i> With <i>Petalawati</i> Bird Head		<i>Petalawati</i>		14	Mythical bird		Light brown	
16 th century	<i>Congkak</i> in the form of <i>Sampan</i>		<i>Sampan</i>		16	Boat	Marble (glass)	Natural Brown	Malay Patani
	<i>Congkak</i> in The form of <i>Perahu</i>		<i>Perahu</i>		16	<i>Bangau</i> or <i>Makara</i>		Brown	
	Carved Boat <i>Congkak 1</i>		Carved		14	-			-
	Carved Boat <i>Congkak 2</i>	Carved	14	-	-				
2000	<i>Congkak</i> 16 Holes Foldable– Multicolored	Plastic	-	-	16	-	Plastic Marble	Red, yellow, blue, white, green	High tech toxic free saving tree
2004	<i>Congkak</i> Junior 12 holes–		-		12	-	Red, yellow, blue,	-	

	Multicolored						white, green	
	Congkak 16 holes-Gold		-		16	-	Gold, Black	
2010	<i>Congkak</i> Lipat	Wood	-		14	-	Marble (glass) Brown	Space saving for storage

4.3 FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEW

Based on the results of the observation in Table 4.2, the researcher managed to identify the types of *congkak* design. The findings indicated that Malay traditional games of *congkak* begin from 14th century until 2010 and had went through quite distinctive changes over the years. Six *congkak* placed at Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu, Kuala Lumpur while two *congkak* was from Muzium Perbadanan Kraf Kuala Lumpur. The influence of Hinduism that was dominating the Malay Archipelago. The *congkak* of Garuda, in example, was an influence of Hinduism. It was brought into the country by the traders such as the Arab traders. Each *congkak* design also representing the status of people. According to Raja Suriaty (2014), some *congkak* came from India and Afrika. The oldest *congkak* was found in Jordan during the 15th century. There are sources stated that the *congkak* game brought by traders from Merah Silu, known as Sumatra, to Malacca because Malacca was a famous trading center among traders from every corner of the world. The maker of contemporary *congkak* should focus on customer needs. In the past, Garuda and Petalawati became the symbols of power of the owner. Therefore such *congkak* was only owned by the aristocracy. The carved boat *congkak*, *sampán* and *perahu congkak* have the same shape and form as it was made during the same period represented the *Jong* or *Jongkak* (literally the boat). The maker imitates the image of boat due to the people's surrounding during that time. The seeds using in traditional *congkak* game was rubber tree seeds, stone, shell and cowrie shells. *Congkak's* design in the era of 21st century do not uses wood as the core material. The seed also has changed to marble or fake beads and easy to get it. The changes of the current *congkak* from the old traditional *congkak* take the whole material, size, form, colour and seed. The foldable *congkak* is easy to carry. The material of *congkak* and seeds from Syarikat Permainan Malaysia (SPM) version is plastic with an additional attractive multiple colours. The foldable *congkak's* on the other hand, maintain its original material which is wood. However, marbles are used as the seed. According to Ting Siew Beng in Malay Mail (issued February 28, 1997), he said the transforms of design is to preserve tradition and is an excellent alternative to video games with their adverse side-effects.

4.3.1 PROS AND CONS OF *CONGKAK* DESIGN TRANSFORMATION

The curator from *Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu* wants the wood carving applied on *congkak* to be maintained. It is to preserve and will be a heritage of the country. Contradict to the curator; the industry prefers something different that could transform the design of *congkak* to be functional and usability, while believing that the new design would attract younger generation. Defending the original of design of *congkak*, Mrs. Raja Suraity Raja Ahmed (2014) said the original *congkak* has its own aesthetical values. The modern *congkak* is nice but was limited for function and usability. According to Mr. Nurul Hadi (2014) he gives some opinion that the *congkak* board design do not necessary has to have meaning because the public do not want to know about the meaning. They just want to play with the *congkak*.

Therefore, the design of *congkak* is determined by people's choice. For example, some people love to have the original design of *congkak* for home decoration for its aesthetic values. The functional new contemporary *congkak* was produced with the limitation that it should not transformed too much that it could affect the original features of the traditional game. For instance, the young generation who was introduced firstly with the plastic, multicolour, foldable *congkak* would think that the original design was a replica as it was made from wood and have carving such those found in the home decor.

Finding from the study concluded that the *congkak* needs to be preserved through various means, while maintaining the traditional sense and keeping the traditional game alive so that it can be sustained and valued by the future generation.

5.1 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research can be considered as successful, although the researchers did not managed to get the exact year of the *congkak* board. In this research, the researcher analyzes the characteristics of *congkak* board design transformation through the theory of Edmund Burke Feldman as the main framework. This theory constructs and analyzes the development of the *congkak* variation through design transformation in term of the use of design, form, material, length and symbolism of the motifs in each head of the *congkak*. This theory will be the main objective to identify some characteristics that will be asset during this research. It can be concluded that the aspects of describing, analyzing, interpreting and evaluation for each *congkak* are important.

The researcher analyzes twelve different *congkak* board designs through an observation and data collection at *Muzium Etnologi Dunia Melayu* Kuala Lumpur and *Muzium Perbadanan Kraftangan* Kuala Lumpur for the collection of *congkak*

from 14th until 16th century, while toys shop for the collections of *congkak* from 2000 to 2010. From the analysis, the researcher can conclude that the *congkak* board design has transform from the traditional design to contemporary design. The result or analysis through Feldman theory shows *congkak* board design from 14th century to 16th century were using the same materials were which are types of various hardwoods. The sizes of congkak boards are big and heavy. The *congkak* board's maintains its form and designs which inspired from 'sampan' and 'perahu' (literally boat) and has the motifs to symbolize in each head of *congkak*. The motifs are of flora, fauna and figure such as *awan larat*.

Transformation of *congkak* board design does not affect the main features of the *congkak* board which are the 'kampung' (literally village) holes and 'rumah' (literally house) holes and still play with the *congkak* seeds. According to the result from the analysis, the transformation happened to the material, size, weight, length, colour, form and motif. Traditional *congkak* board made of hard wood but contemporary *congkak* board made of durable plastic and light in weight. So, the size of the contemporary *congkak* is smaller and light in weight compared to the traditional *congkak* board design. The colour of traditional *congkak* board design is mostly natural, while the contemporary *congkak* board designs are interesting with a variety and multiples colours. It is also can be fold and can be cleaned. The form of contemporary *congkak* board design is simple and more compact compared with traditional *congkak* board design.

The transformation of *congkak* board design happened because of several factors. It can be concludes that this traditional game is facing extinction because of the changing of lifestyle. Besides, the high living costs and environmental issues are also became the factors that caused the transformation. Nowadays, the material from the natural resources is hard to find and this is one of the factors of transformation of the variation of *congkak*. This is because hard wood is hard and heavy to carry, compared to *congkak* board design use material from plastic which is more light-weight, foldable, easy cleaned and easy to carry.

As a result, the objectives of this research are resolved. Finally, it can be concluded that the *congkak* variation through the design transformation from the traditional design to contemporary design is a good way to preserve our traditional *congkak* game.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

Removing old tradition means removing the cultural roots and native spirit of a long-spanning tree of the legacy left of history. The fact is, anything that is reasonable long of history preserved in order not to lose or extinction just the passage of time. However, this can be associated that this collections of *congkak* has its own specific purposes depending on the design, form, material, length and *congkak* variation that is will or ongoing. Today's generation should appreciate the role of *congkak*, which has long taught us to be a mathematical

genius. Not only that, *congkak* also be the beginning of the development of the traditional games about all things especially in the matter of socialize and everything was done with great manners, according to Malay identity that is enough maintaining the hereditary customs inherited from ancestors. The community is more concerned with new and modern equipment that is has nothing to do with the Malay traditional games. More disappointing, some consider preserving these traditional games of a long heritage as troublesome. For those who are concerned, *congkak* now available in various designs that serve as souvenirs, gifts and collections. The replica of *congkak* sleek and modern re-established as a developments and evolutions of it. This relic of the nation's heritage should continue to exist in everyday life, as a symbol of modesty and courtesy are high for the Malay community that is rich in values and that is great civilization.

The researcher would like to suggest a few recommendations for the next research that might be continue by the other researcher in future. Because the lack of documentation about the Malay *congkak* especially from the context of the meanings, it is an honor to see that this research will expand more about the meanings behind Malay *congkak* and its philosophy in Malay society. Next is, the researcher would recommend the study to be more detail about the varieties of *congkak* to add some more data collections and sampling about it, in others museums. This research can elaborate more excluding the data sampling and collections from museum, it might be something extraordinary to collect the data from the private collectors and the owners of *congkak* itself. The fact about the *congkak* used will influence the study to be more solid about the functions of *congkak* between the royal's *congkak* and common peoples. The development of the form of *congkak* can be more specific, such as the Malay *congkak* variations through design transformation including the evaluation and the changes. This might be includes the motifs, meanings and the philosophical aspects that can be elaborate more for the next study. Moreover, the researcher would recommend the research to be more detailed on the development of Malaysian *congkak* in an era of colonialism and post-colonialism to find out more detail about the influence of the surrounding environment. Other researchers can also study more about *congkak* of the ethnic groups that represents Malaysian culture and tradition, using the other theories such as Meyer Schapiro, Arnold Hauser and Henrich Wofflin. Last but not least, *congkak* evolution as an influence of the Islamic research and the influence for the next future research, relating to the data acquired from this study. Researcher hopes that more research on Malaysian *congkak* is made in order to document the almost-extinct art form.

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