

Categorization of Malay *Bengkung* in the Context of Malay Socio-culture

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Received: 1 August 2019 / Accepted: 15 December 2019 / Published online: 30 December 2020

Abstract

This research paper discusses the design and style of Malay *bengkung*. The 1950s was chosen because it is the beginning of fashion trends in Malay State. The transformation in fashion evolves every 10 years. Similarly, the design of the *bengkung* has also undergone its transformation. The main objective of this research is to identify and categorize the design and style of *bengkung* from the year 1950 until 2017. The methodology of this research will involve a qualitative method. Indeed, a method such as observing, describing, and analyzing the design and style of *bengkung* is applied in this research. Hopefully, this research provides broader exposure to the Malay *bengkung* design and definitely to the researchers and scholars in several areas. Perhaps this research benefit in preserving the tradition of “memakai *bengkung*” in the Malay social-cultural.

Keywords - *Bengkung*; Malay; design; style

1. Introduction

Bengkung is a traditional term used in Malay culture, even though there is numerous name related to it. Various terms are referring to *bengkung* design with different styles of usage. The main function of *bengkung* is similar to each other which is to wrap and tighten. The influence of *bengkung* usage is still relevant from the old days until today.

According to G. Bodeker, Hood Salleh, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, C. Jaenicke, J. Gruenwald, And Zurinawati Zainal Abidin (Eds.) (2009), *bengkung* (being-kong) is a body-binding. *Bengkung* refers to a medium, equipment, or tool that is used for postpartum women during the confinement period (Siti Aishah, 2016). *Bengkung* also defines as kain pembalut perut, setagen, korset, sentagi, mintak, sabuk, udet and kain pengikat pinggang (Zainal Abidin, 1995:203). Siti Zainon (2006) highlighted *bengkung* is referring to *ikat pinggang*. The function in to wrap and tighten the *sampin* or sarong in Malay Costume. *Ikat pinggang* is a part of the set in Lima Persalinan Pakaian Cara Melayu. The 15th century is the golden age of the Melaka kingdom which this set of the costume is only worn by Sultanate. This is different from Bambang and Nik Hassan (2008:265) in the history of the Palembang civilization, they found *ikat pinggang* used at the artifact culture. The name of *ikat pinggang* at that time is called *ikat perut*.

‘Malay’ referring to the Malay World including Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, and Brunei (Zaharah, Wan Hashim and Nik Hassan, 2016). According to Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, Zuliskandar, Mohamad Zain, Adnan (Eds.)(2011), the word ‘Malay’ in Malaysia referring to the Constitution Article 160 (2), can be defined as the nation of a person who is from the Malay lineage, or someone who converts to Islam practices Malay customs, speaks Malay, born before the independence of the Malay land either in federal

Malaya or Singapore or resides in the federal Malaya or Singapore on the day of independence. Mention by Wan Hashim (2012), Malay is defined into three different contexts which are Malay in Indonesian contexts, Malay in Malaysian contexts, and Malay in the Malay world. According to Wan Hashim, the definition of Malay in Malaysian contexts arise after the Malay in Indonesian contexts been repealed cause of events that occurred around 1928. Then, the cause of the event Malaysia constitution article 160 (2) appeal to defines 'Malay' as mention by Nik Hassan before.

Malay culture is rich in customs and traditions. The customs such as marriage, childbirth, circumcision, and piercing are the tradition that was inherited from old Malay society and continues until today (Syed Alwi Sheikh Al- Hadi, 1986). This is agreed by Mohd. Koharuddin Mohd. Bawi (2005), the Malay customs and traditions were passed down from generation to generation and strongly bound the community in Malay culture. The tradition and customs such as marriage and confinement after childbirth are related to the bengkung. In wedding costume, there is the use of bengkung call ikat pinggang (Zainal Abidin,1995; Siti Zainon, 2006). Bengkung design and style in this paper refer to bengkung in confinement after childbirth and bengkung (ikat pinggang). Design can be defined as a plan that shows the composition, structure in form, building, or pattern (Kamus Dewan Third Edition, 1997). Based on the data collected, found there is various type of Malay bengkung design in Malaysia (Norizan, 2016).

Besides the design of bengkung, the style of using bengkung is also been identified in this paper. The style is the general way in which is done or presented (An English-Malay Dictionary,1997). In this paper, style is about the style of wearing bengkung, both confinement bengkung and also bengkung (ikat pinggang).

2. Design and Style of Malay Bengkung

The design and style of Malay bengkung can be found in the Malay wedding costume, warrior costume, bengkung for postpartum women in confinement, and undergarment as a body shaper. It is functioning to straightening the backbone, relieve back pain, body shaper for a good posture and to look slimmer, support abdomen or another body part (Anisah, 2007; Sharifah, 2009; Siti Aishah, 2016), to wrap and tighten the sampin, a place to hold the weapon like keris, as abdomen protector from enemies stabbed and support the abdomen (Zubaidah Sual, 1994; Siti Zainon, 2006).

Bengkung for *ikat pinggang* and *bengkung* for postpartum design is slightly similar, but the shape, size, material use, and detailing is different. The style of wearing *bengkung* is different but the main purpose is as support abdomen for both *bengkung*. The time and place use is also different. Mostly, *bengkung* (ikat pinggang) is used for men's such as in sultanate costume, wedding costume, and warrior costume.

3. Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is a qualitative method. An object-based research method is applied to observe, describe and analyze the *bengkung* precisely. This paper refers to the design shape of the Malay *bengkung* from 1950 until 2017, referring to *bengkung* for women in confinement and *bengkung* (*ikat pinggang*). Based on observation of the design and style of *bengkung*, it is difficult to find the design for the year 1950 until 2000. Mostly, the data gathered by interviews with the old generation who experience the *bengkung* and also the expert in the field such as costume collectors, midwives, both traditional and modern. The visual data of *bengkung* are collected from old magazines found in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur. The data of bengkung design from the year 2000 to 2017 was gathered by samples from an individual, costume collector, midwife, and retailers who are selling the confinement products. This research is an emphasis on the Malay culture in Malaysia focus on the Malay *bengkung* design and style from 1950 until 2017.

4. Research Findings.

The research is focusing on the categorization of Malay *bengkung*. The design and style of *bengkung* from 1950 until 2017 are studied. Malay *bengkung* can be categorized into three categories. The first category is confinement *bengkung* which is for postpartum women in confinement period. The second category is *bengkung* for custom clothing that has been wearing by the sultanate. The third category is *bengkung* for daily wear which is commoners wear it as daily wear.

The three categorizations are shown in table 1 until table 3 below.

4.1 Categorization of Malay *Bengkung*

Table 1: Confinement *Bengkung*





Type of <i>bengkung</i>	Confinement <i>Bengkung</i>			
Sample Design				
Sources	'Wanita' Magazine 1990	'Famili' Magazine 1986		D'herbs product, 2016
Description	Bengkung tali kasut and Bengkung panjang / bengkung jawa	Bengkung tali kasut	Bengkung panjang / bengkung jawa	Bengkung roda
Design	Malay women wear this bengkung after childbirth, The confinement period is 44 days. It is a tradition in Malay custom as protection and prevention for women health and beauty entire well-being. It is being practiced in the traditional Malay culture until today. It plays a great part in women health and beauty treatment. It is believed that wearing bengkung in confinement help to shrink the womb, slimmer the body, avoid from cold air, prevention from uterus prolapsed and the best practice for women health and beauty.			
Style	The shape is rectangle. Different sizes. Detailing : no detailing. Plain. The position of this bengkung is at waistline. The method is wrap and tie with safety pin and sometimes just wrap, tie and knot. The style of wearing is without pending and metal belt for commoners.			

Table 2: Bengkung for custom clothing (bengkung for Pakaian Adat)








Type of bengkung	Confinement Bengkung			
Sample Design				
Sources	Zubaidah Sual, Busana Melayu 1994	Magazine 'Wanita' 1990	En. Azwarin Ahmed, Muzium Kuala Terengganu 2018	ASAL 2018 Conferences
Description	<p>Bengkung as a daily costume in Kelantan men's daily wear Bengkung (ikat pinggang). This bengkung used in daily wear and certain occasion. It is an informal costume worn by commoners. It is function to wrap and tighten the sampin or pants, a place to hold the weapon like keris, as abdomen protector from enemies stabbed, support the abdomen and also as a pocket to storage the money, betel leaves, cigarettes, and other small things.</p>			
Design	<p>The shape is rectangle. Different sizes. Detailing : different for each bengkung. Plain or have straps and loops as detailing to tie the bengkung.</p>			
Style	<p>Picture 1 to 4 : the style of wearing bengkung is wrap and tie with bengkung tali kasut, then bound again with bengkung panjang. Picture 5 : the style of wearing bengkung roda is wrap and tie. The position of this bengkung start from empire line (underbust) until below hipline.</p>			

Table 3: Bengkung for daily wear (bengkung for Pakaian Harian)

Type of bengkung	Bengkung for custom clothing		
Sample Design			
Sources	Khoo Kay Kim 1991	ASAL 2018 Conferences	Zubaidah Sual, ASAL 2018 Conferences
Description	<p>Bengkung use in Yang di-Pertuan Agong costume</p> <p>Bengkung (ikat pinggang). This bengkung used for a formal occasion and in formal costume specifically for Sultanate and lords.</p> <p>It is function to wrap and tighten the sampin, a place to hold the weapon like keris, as abdomen protector from enemies stabbed and support the abdomen.</p>		
Design	<p>The shape is rectangle. Different sizes.</p> <p>Detailing : no detailing. Plain.</p>		
Style	<p>The position of this bengkung is at waistline. The method is wrap and tie with safety pin.</p> <p>It is coordinate with pending and metal belt in sultanate costume. Costume for Sultan's dignitaries, without pending and metal belt.</p>		

5. Conclusion

In a conclusion, found that there are similarities and differences in the design and style of Malay *bengkung* for both confinement *bengkung* and *bengkung (ikat pinggang)*. The similarity is the term use call *bengkung*. Both are traditional wear. The main function of *bengkung* is as an abdomen support medium besides other functions. The difference is related to the user group gender (men and women). The design, style, usage, and the benefit different to suit the *bengkung* function.

The confinement *bengkung* specifically for women. It gives benefit to the women's entire well-being. It is for their health and beauty in the golden age and proven by women in the old days. Today, there is a various approach to encourage women to wear *bengkung*. Spa and mobile midwives are some of the approaches built to help postpartum women in confinement. Yet it is costly but this is the solution and approach to care for women in confinement to recover their health and beauty after childbirth. Those designs and style were created to fulfill the women desire.

Bengkung (ikat pinggang) mostly wear by men. It is divided into two categories, custom clothing, and daily wear. Both have the same function. The difference between the group of wearer and occasion. Nowadays, the usage of *bengkung* is just for the formal occasion and not for daily wear as in the past time. While *bengkung* in confinement is used for postpartum women after childbirth. The time use is within 44 days during the confinement period. In the past, most women will continue wearing the *bengkung* after 44 days as daily wear to support the abdomen while they do their daily chores. They wear it with *kebaya pendek* and sarong. Nowadays, the tradition of wearing *bengkung* discontinue because of the fashion evolve.

Overall, bengkung is not a seasonal support medium. It can be considered as a support garment and as a traditional body shaper. The usage of bengkung is still relevant today. The benefit and the effectiveness of wearing bengkung are widely explored this 'Malay bengkung' as one of identity in Malay culture. The significance of Malay culture cannot be denied. Although the research in the design and style of bengkung is limited, the purposes, usage, and benefit should constantly remind for the future generation knowledge. This is the beauty of Malay culture, whereby the knowledge passes down generation by generation, constantly to remind each other.

Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge the generous participation in the completion of this research. This study was conducted in the Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA. Fully appreciate for providing the facilities, equipment, and expertise to completing this research. Special thanks to the FSSR research initiative group for the assistance given for the research can be carried out successfully.

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