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# **Malay Worldview on the Ornamental Design in Malay Hikayat Manuscript**

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### **Abstract**

The Malay world is known for its strong culture and identity with high aesthetical value and the spread of Islam in the region has raised the nobility of Malay civilization. Henceforth, the literature in the Malay world plays an essential verification in Malay history. Recent studies stated that the lack of appreciation of Malay Hikayat manuscripts is becoming a growing concern. Thus, this research helps to identify the characteristic of the ornamental design in Malay *Hikayat* manuscripts, and it attempts to study and evaluate the ornamental design of Malay Hikayat manuscripts that influence the Malay socio-cultural and tradition.

Keywords: Malay world, malay hikayat, ornamental design, socio-cultural

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### **1.0 Introduction**

The Malay world extends from Vietnam, Cambodia, to southern Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the southern Philippines (Mohd Suhaimi Haji Ishak & Osman Chuah Abdullah, 2012). According to Abdullah Munsyi, an author of *Sulalatus Salatin* (Malay Annals) in 1612, he mentioned that many regions of the Malay world were once under the reign of Kingdom Sriwijaya that came from Palembang. Islam came to Pasai in the twelfth century by the Arab and through the emergence of Islam in the Malay world, it developing the intellectual aspect of the Malay civilization hence the growth of Malay literature or known as Malay manuscript became one of the significant material cultures to the Malay civilization (Mohd Suhaimi Haji Ishak & Osman Chuah Abdullah, 2012).

Malay manuscript is written in the Malay language in a form of Arabic script that is known as Jawi and has several genres of literature. Hence, this context of research focuses on Malay Hikayat which is known to have a great element of literature and critical language. Some of the Hikayat created after the arrival of Islam developed an ornamental design and illumination as a decoration element (Annabel Teh Gallop, 1991). Besides, numerous motifs of vegetal and geometrical are involved thus every motif carries out significant meanings and philosophies that are related to the Malay people. Henceforth, it conveys a bigger value and meaning as a whole (Jurnal Filologi Melayu Jilid 25, 2018).

However, the awareness of today's society on the importance of the Malay manuscript especially Hikayat is unsettling. According to Culture and Arts Department director-general Tan Sri Norliza Rofli from her interview with The Star Online (2017), she emphasizes that culture is one of the remarkable aspects in cultivating the society's identity hence plays an important role in the nation's development. However, nowadays society is seen to neglect and disregard the significance of culture and the subsidiary materials underneath. The study and appreciation of manuscript art in the Malay region are lacking in awareness and interest therefore some art historians and

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philologists are rarely drawn interested in the decoration elements in codicology studies. Due to this scenario, art historians, philologists, and academicians should work on developing an awareness and appreciation towards the significance of the decoration element of Malay Hikayat manuscripts as it contains the identity of our Malay socio-cultural values (Mohd Hamizar Hamid, 2014). Thus, this research aimed to evaluate the ornamental design of Malay Hikayat manuscripts' influence towards the Malay socio-cultural and tradition.

## 2.0 Methodology

This research is focusing on the intrinsic meaning and value of the ornamental design in the Hikayat manuscript hence an in-depth interview and sample observation will be carried out to accumulate the data for further analysis. Through the interview, it contributes more detailed information that is important for the research via open-ended questions that are divided into three sections; general questions, specific questions and opinion questions. Besides, two types of question sets will help to comply with the needs in accordance to meet the relevance of the informants' criteria. An observation method will be held at Pusat Kebangsaan Manuskrip Malaysia and Za'ba Memorial Library to look through samples of Malay Hikayat manuscripts specifically on the codicology studies of the ornamental designs.

Aside from that, literature reviews from books, journals, written articles, thesis dissertations, sources from valid website articles such as Google scholar, digital journals also will be the main references to help strengthen the data collection and further perform the data analysis.

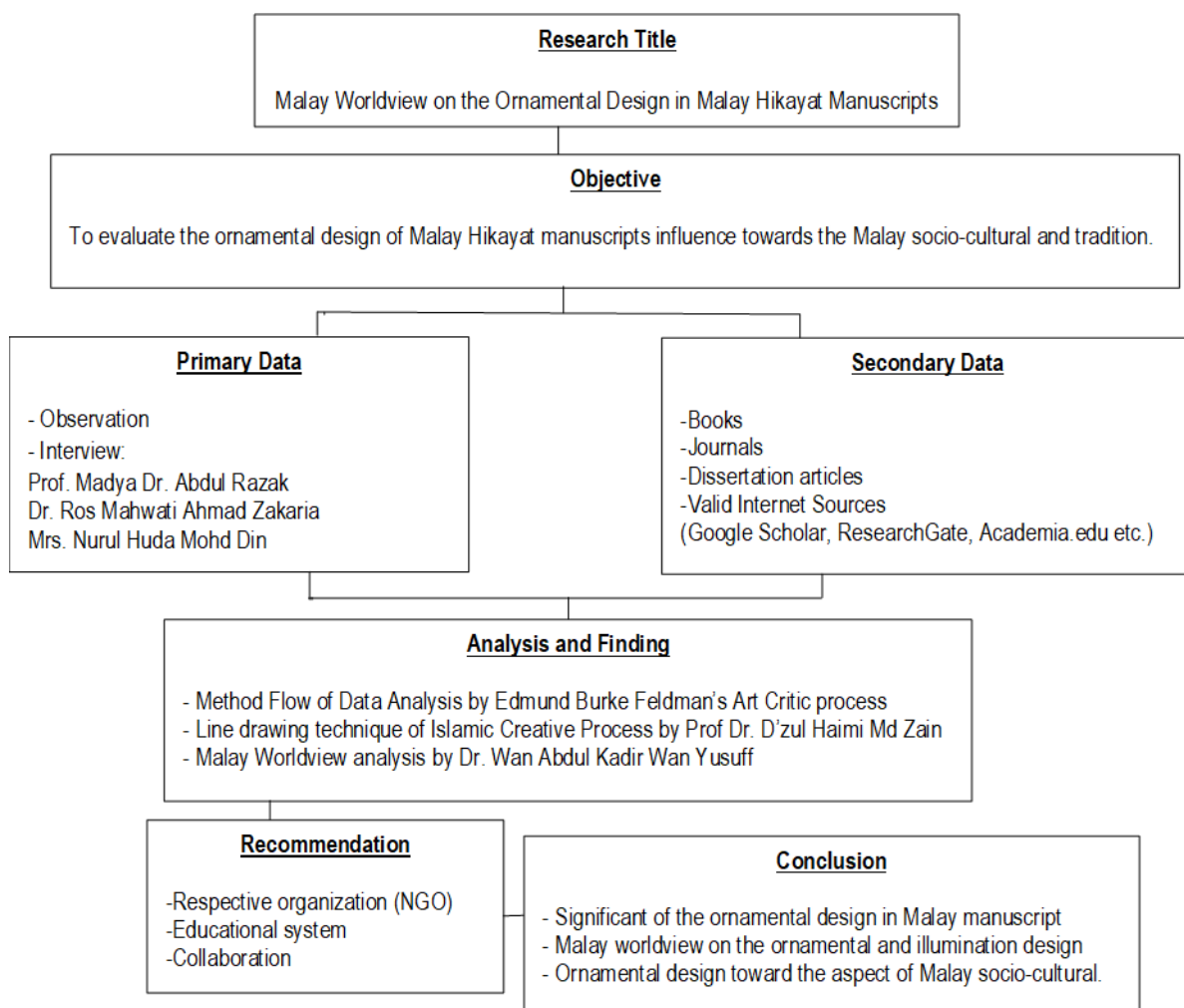


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the research.

## 3.0 Data Analysis

This research constructs a data analysis from six samples of the Malay Hikayat manuscripts by following the theoretical framework process. Here, an art criticism theory by Edmund Burke Feldman will be a guideline process to systemize the flow of the data analysis. Hence, proceeding to the interview analysis from four informants specified by several professional criteria that will help to authenticate the points

extracted. Thus, correlation analyses from the samples' observation and interview data, researcher then comes out with an evaluation and finding.

Table 1. List of six samples of Hikayat Manuscript

No	Malay Hikayat manuscript	Sources
1	Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah	British Digitised Library
2	Hikayat Cekel Waneng Pati 2	British Digitised Library
3	Hikayat Parang Puting	British Digitised Library
4	Hikayat Nabi Bercukur	Pusat Kebangsaan Manuskrip Melayu
5	Hikayat Hang Tuah	Pusat Kebangsaan Manuskrip Melayu
6	Hikayat Seri Rama	Za'ba Memorial Library, University of Malaya

Table 2. Informants for the interview data

No	Informant	Profession	Criteria
1	Prof. Madya. Dr. Abdul Razak	Lecturer of Akademi Pengajian Melayu faculty, University of Malaya.	Academician, Expert and Researcher
2	Dr. Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria	Lecturer and Research Fellow of Institute of The Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), The National University of Malaysia.	Academician, Expert and Researcher
3	Mrs. Nurul Huda Mohd Din	Lecturer of MARA University of Technology and currently a PhD Researcher of Al-Quran Illumination.	Academician and Researcher

### 3.1 Data Analysis on One Sample of Malay Hikayat Manuscript

This research begins with the process by Edmund Burke Feldman's Four Steps Structure of Art Criticism in extracting the description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. Hence, the process will insert a line drawing technique referring to Islamic creative process by D'zul Haimi Md. Zain; imitation, denaturalization, stylization, and abstraction to liberate the motif details. To strengthen the analysis in completing the objective, this research will also include a theory of Malay Worldview by Dr. Wan Abdul Kadir Wan Yusoff explains four elements; motif, influence, worldview and form and content.

#### 3.1.1 Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah



Figure 2. Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah

According to a lead curator of British Library Annabel Teh Gallop (1991), *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* with a code of MSS Malay B.6 was written by Muhammad Kasim on 29 Jumadilakhir 1220 or 25 August 1805 with a dimension of 200 x 140mm on a Chinese paper with thirteen lines per page, black ink, and with several illuminations. Hence, it was written in a Malay language with Jawi calligraphy and

bound with a full woody brown leather binding. This Malay Hikayat manuscript is currently under the collection of the British Library. The first two opening pages or double-frontispieces were ornamented with rectangular frames with several repetition motifs colored in red ink with a black outline. There are also four-petalled flower motifs at each corner of the frame coloured in red, pink, and slightly reserved white (British Digitised Manuscripts, 2019).

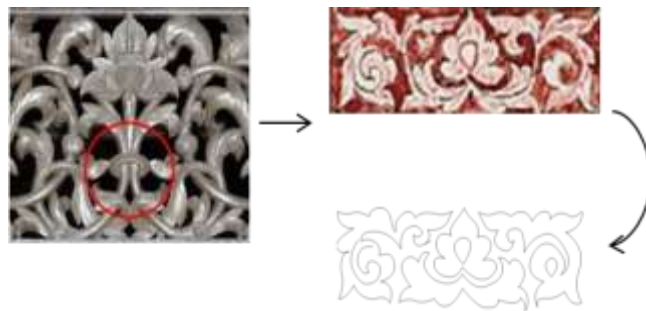


Figure 3. Imitation and similarity of the woodcarving motif on the window panel of Istana Tengku long, Terengganu and the ornamental of Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah.

The second stage is analysis. Here, it will go within the context of the ornamental design of the manuscript by using the technical drawing technique referring to the Islamic creative process to constructively extract every motif. The first process is imitation where the character and motif of the ornamentations from *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* have a great similarity with the *Awan Larat* and *Sulur Bayung* of the window panel of Istana Tengku Long's woodcarving motif design. Secondly is the denaturalization process of *Bunga Pecah Empat*. The shape of the petals emphasized the distinct element of *Bunga Pecah Empat* signifying the balance element and simplicity. Besides, the colour used is also being denaturalized from the actual inspiration to respect the guidelines of the creative process hence allowed the artist to experiment with their creativity and ideation.

The stylization process focuses on the *Sulur* or *Awan Larat* ornamentation design on the Hikayat where the design's shapes and sizes of each repeated pattern are identical. According to Wan Mustapha Wan Su, the elements of *Awan Larat* are ocean waves, smoke, and clouds that show that nature inspires and plays a significant influence on the philosophy of *Awan Larat* (Mohd Sabrizaa Abd Rashid, 2008). Lastly, the abstraction phase requires a profound understanding of the philosophical lies behind the ornamentation. According to the book *Serian Ukiran* by Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan (Mohd Sabrizaa Abd Rashid, 2008), the ornamentation of *Awan Larat* is categorized by two characters which are *Awan Larat Melayu Asli* and *Awan Larat Jawa*. Through distinct observation, this ornamental design of *Awan larat* from *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* was specifically inspired by the characteristic of *Awan Larat Melayu Asli* due to the resemblance of *Awan Larat Melayu Asli* that has a large flower on the center named as *Ibu* or *Punca* with lacing motif of *Sulur*. Hence, the delicateness is much more elegant and subtle.

As for the third stage which is interpretation, a Malay Worldview theory by Dr. Wan Abdul Kadir Wan Yusoff will be used to carry out an extensive analysis explanation of the Malay worldview on the ornamental design. *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* has plain and direct motifs used. *Bunga Pecah Empat* was repeated on each corner of the frame and the *Sulur* motif was reflected between the left and right panel. As for the *Awan Larat* with *Punca* motif, it was also a reflection between the top and bottom panel. The next element is influence. The motifs used in this Hikayat are minimal and repetitive thus only three significant motifs were identified; *Sulur*, *Awan Larat*, and *Bunga Pecah Empat*. The element of *Awan Larat* can be influenced by the natural surroundings such as clouds, ocean waves, rooster tails, etc. Thus, the aesthetic composition must be reflecting the delicateness of the origin. Besides, the elements of floral lacing spread out were influenced by the Malay motifs such as *Sulur Kacang*, *Bunga Ketumbit*, *Daun Petola*, and *Daun Kiambang* that might inspire the artists.

The four-petalled flower is said to be inspired by *Bunga Setawar* or any similar four-petalled flowers. According to Arba'iyah Ab. Aziz (2018), nature concept in Malay extrinsic element is unlimited as it expands the relation with air, earth crust, and deep-sea. There is also a Tawhidic Worldview of *Awan Larat* where the metaphor of *Punca* is designed as a dominant motif that somehow represents the Almighty. The *Sulur* element was delicately expanding without harming any and lived in harmony. Hence, it reminds the Almighty's blessing that it will always flow. The last element of the Malay Worldview is form and content. Eventually, the whole concept of the formalistic aspect of the ornamental design in this *Hikayat* is the element of organic shape. Furthermore, the colours used are limited between red and black which are dominantly filled within the space of the frame panel. As for the content, the ornamental design lies under the significant value of the motifs that are much related to the identity and culture of the Malay.

The final stage of sample data analysis is judgment. *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* is seen to be related with the motifs used on Malay textile and woodcarving and the composition of *Sulur* and *Awan Larat* is similar to the philosophical concept of woodcarving. Besides, the characteristic of the ornamented frame panel has the influence and distinct resemblance concept with Kelantan and Terengganu ornamented wooden gate. In a nutshell, the motif might be different and unique to represent each material or platform but the concept and philosophical principle will revolve around its root of the Malay worldview.

### 3.2 Data Analysis of Interview

Three informants among researchers, academicians, and manuscript experts will be receiving the same interview questions set which is divided into three sections; general question, specific question and opinion question. The interview will divide the informants into informants A, B and C:

- A is Prof. Madya. Dr. Abdul Razak
- B is Dr. Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria
- C is Mrs. Nurul Huda Mohd Din

Question	Informant	Answer
<b>General Question</b>		
1. Can you please share about ornamental design in Malay manuscript?	A	Ornamental designs in Malay manuscript have the influence of Hinduism-Buddhism and Islamic motif design. However, since the arrival of Islam, Quran from the Malay world and religious Malay manuscripts such as <i>Kitab Maulid</i> , <i>Dala'il</i> , Quran etc. were known to implement an intricate aesthetic of Ornamental and Illumination design.
	B	
	C	
<b>Specific Question</b>		
2. Besides functioning as decoration, is there any functional significance of ornamental design in Malay manuscript?	A	The other function of ornamental design besides decoration is defined by the type of manuscript itself. For example, decoration on manuscript <i>Surat Melayu</i> is reflecting the identity of the writer, ornamentation design on Quran manuscript defining a deeper intrinsic value of <i>Nur</i> , and Door to the knowledge. Hence, medical manuscript illustration perceives a human anatomy, disease etc.
	B	
	C	
3. Is there any element of symbolism or semiotics which is related to socio-cultural and tradition in Malay manuscript ornamental design?	A	The ornamental design of Malay World does have a symbolism, semiotic, philosophy and worldview. This is due to Malay during that time having high interest in literature, metaphors etc. For example; the philosophical and symbolism of <i>Awan Iarat</i> that contains a deep philosophical understanding of <i>Punca</i> that is related to <i>Tawhidic</i> worldview.
	B	
	C	
<b>Opinion question</b>		
4. From your observation, what are the usual motifs used on Malay manuscript ornamental design?	A	Common motifs used on Malay manuscripts from previous observation research and studies are <i>Sulur</i> and <i>Awan Iarat</i> , <i>Bunga Pecah Empat</i> , <i>Tampuk Manggis</i> , and other vegetal motifs that were inspired from floral motifs in the Malay World.
	B	
	C	
5. From your understanding, why ornamental design on manuscript received lack of recognition rather than woodcarving and textile?	A	Due to lack of documentation and exclusivity standard of Malay manuscript collection being preserved, it had limited the commercial value and promotional effort. Hence, most manuscript researchers tend to pursue philological study and not much are interested in involving on codicological study of ornamental design in Malay manuscript.
	B	
	C	
6. Is there an existence of Malay Worldview on the ornamental design in Malay manuscript?	A	Malay ornamental designs have their intrinsic messages and symbolisms thus these elements created a worldview of the Malay world that has been preserved as a cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation.
	B	
	C	
7. Does ornamental design in Malay manuscripts have a significant role in the development of Malay socio-cultural and tradition?	A	There is a high possibility in defining the influence of ornamental design in Malay socio-cultural. However, it needs deeper knowledge and research on philosophy to find the result that lies behind the motif design. Nonetheless, observation on the relation between the intricateness and finesse of the Malay motifs and the gentleness of Malay <i>budi</i> (mannerism) is somehow connected and relatable to one another.
	B	
	C	

#### 4.0 Finding

Malay ornamental design in the Malay Hikayat manuscript perceived a similar interpretation of symbolical and philosophical related to woodcarving and textile motif designs. Malay ornamental design is derived from the natural motifs that have an influenced by multiple beliefs such as Animism, Hinduism-Buddhism, and Islam that have great influences on the development of art and culture of the Malay civilization hence the cultivation of motifs used until today. A thorough and constructive analysis has been made on the Malay Hikayat manuscript samples thus strengthening the informants' knowledge, and opinions. The ornamentation design in the Malay manuscript as a whole is much related to other Malay art mediums and it accommodates with a great Malay philosophical, semiotic, and intrinsic message that helps to develop the Malay socio-cultural attribute and tradition.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

The Islamic influence in the Malay World has succeeded in determining and developing the design of the motifs. Besides, the environment and natural elements of the Malay World also encourage the adaptation of floral in inspiring the art of Malay ornamental design. The vegetal and floral motifs are significant in Malay art as a major source that can be used in Islamic art besides cosmology motifs as an

appreciation of the beauty of God's creation. Thus, the Malay Hikayat manuscript is one of the mediums where the artist expresses his inspiration of God's aesthetical creation into the ornamental design that contains great philosophy and symbolism of Malay culture and tradition.

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