

Research Proposal

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Research Topic: Iconography, Meanings and Significance of the Placement of Woodcarvings in Malay Houses

Research Aims: The aim of this study is to investigate the iconography of woodcarving motifs and placement of carved components in vernacular houses which denotes its significant use.

Research Objectives

The research attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify visual attributes of Malay woodcarving placed in timber houses in Kelantan and Terengganu vernacular architecture.
2. To analyze the uses, styles and pattern of regularity of Malay motifs in woodcarving placed in timber houses.
3. To find the intrinsic meaning or content that can be symbolically as having religious, cultural or other connotations.

Assumptions

There is an existence of pattern of regularity in the composition of woodcarving and placement of carved components in Malay houses.

Research Questions

The questions of this research are divided as follow:

Woodcarving

1. What is the visual attributes of Malay woodcarving placed in timber houses in Kelantan and Terengganu vernacular architecture.
2. Why do craftsmen apply nature as principal motifs in woodcarving?
3. Why and how do the craftsmen transform the plant motifs that barely resemble their real-life image?
4. Do all motifs depicted in decorative wood carving contain symbolic meaning?
5. What are the uses, styles and pattern of regularity of carving motifs developed in Malay woodcarving?
6. Do the placements of the ornamental carved components as building decoration reflect the craftsman's adherence to the specific style of Malay architecture?
7. Do Malay craftsmen use the compositional principles, which provide them with structural guidelines for the ordering and treatment of visual elements (motifs) so that a predefined audience recognizes and understands the message idea or intent of the woodcarving?

Craftsman

1. What are the contents of motifs depictions that are applied in woodcarving?
2. Do the craftsmen understanding of the Malay aesthetic philosophy determines the distinct characteristics and features of woodcarving?
3. Do craftsmen produce the woodcarvings in relation to its significant functions?
4. Do Malay craftsmen use the compositional principles, which provide them with structural guidelines for the ordering and treatment of visual elements (motifs) so that a predefined audience recognizes and understands the message idea or intent of the woodcarving?
5. Do the level of artistry and technical skill of the craftsmen determines the distinct characteristics and features of woodcarving?
6. Do the craftsmen produce the carved components for the particular reason?
7. Do the differences in the forms of carved components and the deployment and depiction of motifs reflect the craftsmen's individual interpretation and translation?
8. Are the iconographical representations in harmony with the Malay's philosophy of beauty and aesthetics?

Problem Statement

The art of woodcarving is inseparable from the art of vernacular architecture since both belong to the same field and have been practiced by the Malays throughout the ages. Vernacular architecture represents the architecture of the common people that is an embodiment of common characters, materials and aesthetic value of a particular region (Gokhan, 2002). Woodcarving is an item which is strong in definition of the character of the vernacular type which should be kept as it is. Furthermore, the art of woodcarving is a form of handicraft that has long existed in parallel with the Malay design (Muhammad, 1995). It is observed that each carved components relates well with the house form and elements which indicate that there is an inherent order and principles of design that is expressed in a particular fashion. Thus a detailed study could be conducted to find out the compositional principles used in the woodcarving. The visual organizational principles are used to construct the relationship among the visual elements of form, the compositional elements, and the intended meaning (Wallschlaeger and Busic-Snyder, 1992).

The art of woodcarving serves as an evident of human expression and ways of communicating their thoughts. Bear (1998) has offered the question of whether ornament does communicate either explicitly or implicitly. In her chapter on the meaning of ornament, she has suggested that the proper understanding of their meaning can only be reached by detailed studies not only of the formal and technical aspects of these decorations, but also by considering the regional, social and religious variations of the people who created and beheld them.

The woodcarving is a traditional art that reflects the local traditions and customs which should be kept and strengthened especially in the current exposure to the threats of rapid changes and developments of the modern architecture. The remains are considered to be part of our invaluable heritage and they are of lasting historical and cultural importance. Recent trend has indicated that modern Malay houses are changing to the use of non-traditional elements and building components. These changes in the Malay houses lead to the disappearance of its genuine qualities and traditional values. The changes, scarcity and elimination of traditional arts and crafts from the present setting would lead to a massive loss for the Malay society. Consequently, this scenario would create an environment deprived of its genuine Malay identity. Hence this research intends to investigate the visual attributes of woodcarving in vernacular houses in order to revitalize and build up an appreciation of the traditional heritage. Indeed, these traditional arts and crafts do not accept interruption but require constant protection. Lately, this tradition has been thought to be on the edge of eradication (Farish and Khoo, 2003). As such, it is vital to conduct a study on the design forms and characteristics of Malay woodcarving in vernacular architecture as well as its significances and meanings.

In recent years, the craftsmanship of woodcarving has lost much of its pre-eminence. Because the present generations live in the era of fast technological development, regional identity will soon disappear. Hence there is a need to restore the richness of the vernacular heritage. The traditional creations and knowledge could be eventually marginalized and forgotten by the modern generations including craftsmen if the modern trend of creations came into being. Today, these creations and knowledge are all but lost except to the handful of experts and masters of the traditional craftsmanship. Cultural elements have influenced the design philosophy of woodcarving (Abdul Halim, 1987), which has significant

relationship with the design of Malay woodcarving. The study that would be carried out is very timely as many aspects of traditional values have attributed to the woodcarving craftsmanship has yet to be studied into. It is interesting to investigate how this art form was transformed and undergone the making processes with specific technical skill, mechanism and design principles. These factors influence and determine the level of artistry and creativity, style and identity of Malay craftsmanship (Jamal, 1994). They reflect the artistic tradition of the Malay craftsmen. Hence, this explanatory as well as exploratory research would be carried out to investigate the philosophy of craftsmen, iconography of wood carving motifs and placement of carved components prevalent in timber houses which denotes its meanings and significant use. The objective of iconography is primarily concerned with the attributions of works of art or with dating as well as aesthetics (Straten, 1994). This study hopes to gather some valuable representative samples so that the beauty and craftsmanship of the woodcarving can be referred for the future development. This art has vernacular values with their own identity and aesthetic which are indispensable. These values of vernacular which can be transferred to the next generations should be analyzed and revealed.

Theoretical Framework of Woodcarving

Art is the mirror of a culture and its worldview. This statement directly applies to the art of the Malay, as mentioned by Othman (1995). He has suggested that the splendid achievements of any civilization are reflected in the brilliant forms of art. Physical and spiritual aspects of art have largely influenced the pattern and lifestyle of the Malay society, especially after the acceptance of Islam. Zulkifli (2000) has averred to the fact that these designs were probably influenced by a number of factors related to Malay customs, religious beliefs, the natural environment and the artistic skills of the Malay craftsmen. (Rosnawati,

(2005) posits that six basic rules that guide wood-carving design form are: (1) radiating from the source, (2) the natural rhythmic growth of lines, (3) decoration follows nature, (4) harmony in contrast, (5) decoration as an integral part of construction, (6) balanced distribution of surface decoration. The diagram of principles of composition is shown in Figure 1.0.

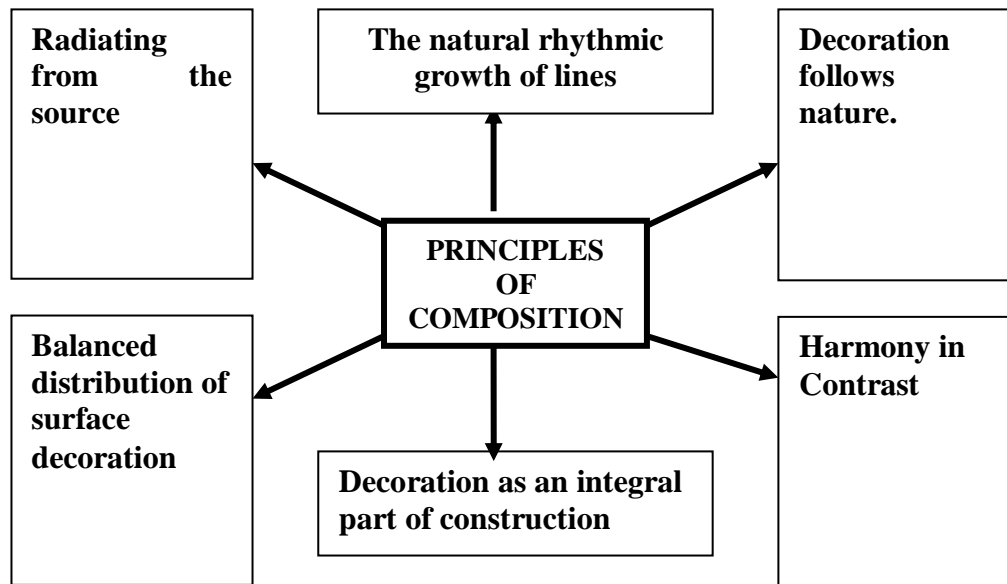


Figure 1.0: Principles of composition in Malay woodcarving posited by Rosnawati (2005).

Syed Zulflida (2004) postulates six basic principles of Malay aesthetic to describe, analyze and evaluate the craft products produced by Malay artisans. The six basic principles including (1) affinity to nature, (2) utility of craft, (3) unity, (4) contrast, (5) symbolism, (6) harmony and balance. Nature has been a source of inspirations for Malay craftsmen. The crafts created by the artisans are a reflection of their observation of beauty, form and possibilities of living nature. The most objective of a craft is functional and useful. The shape and forms of an object are in accordance with its basic function. Unity is an important principle in the art of Malay craftsmanship. In woodcarving, the vines and foliage intertwine

around a flower and the whole vegetal motifs are in harmony and united thus creating a center of attraction and accomplishing a pleasing and satisfying composition. Symbols are used to determine the unity between shape and content. The craftsman derives his symbols from the phenomena of nature and harmonizes them in his craft. The Malay artisan sees the quality of harmony and balance in nature and become the characteristic of his crafts. The Malay artisan considers using the five physical elements in any analysis of aesthetics including: (1) the rhythm of lines, (2) the massing of forms, (3) the use of space, (4) Light and shade, (5) the spectrum of colours. Zakaria (1989) highlights the six principles that constitute the Malay concept of the beautiful: (1) the principle of refinement refers to the sense of refined sensitivity, (2) the principle of flexibility refers both to the actual process and approach to art making as well as to artistic sensibility, (3) the principle of balance connotes the notion of an ideal composition and sense of order, (4) the principle of unity seeks to integrate the various elements within a framework and turned into orderly structure, (5) the principle of functionality stresses on practical function of the artifact defines its beauty, (6) the principle of symbolism relates to the use of symbol to express religio-spiritual perception of ultimate reality . The principles and elements of aesthetic contribute to the understanding of meaning of woodcarving. Thus promote the aesthetic pleasure which are based on creativity, logic and intuition of Malay craftsmen. The summary of the interrelationship of these components are shown in Figure 2.0.

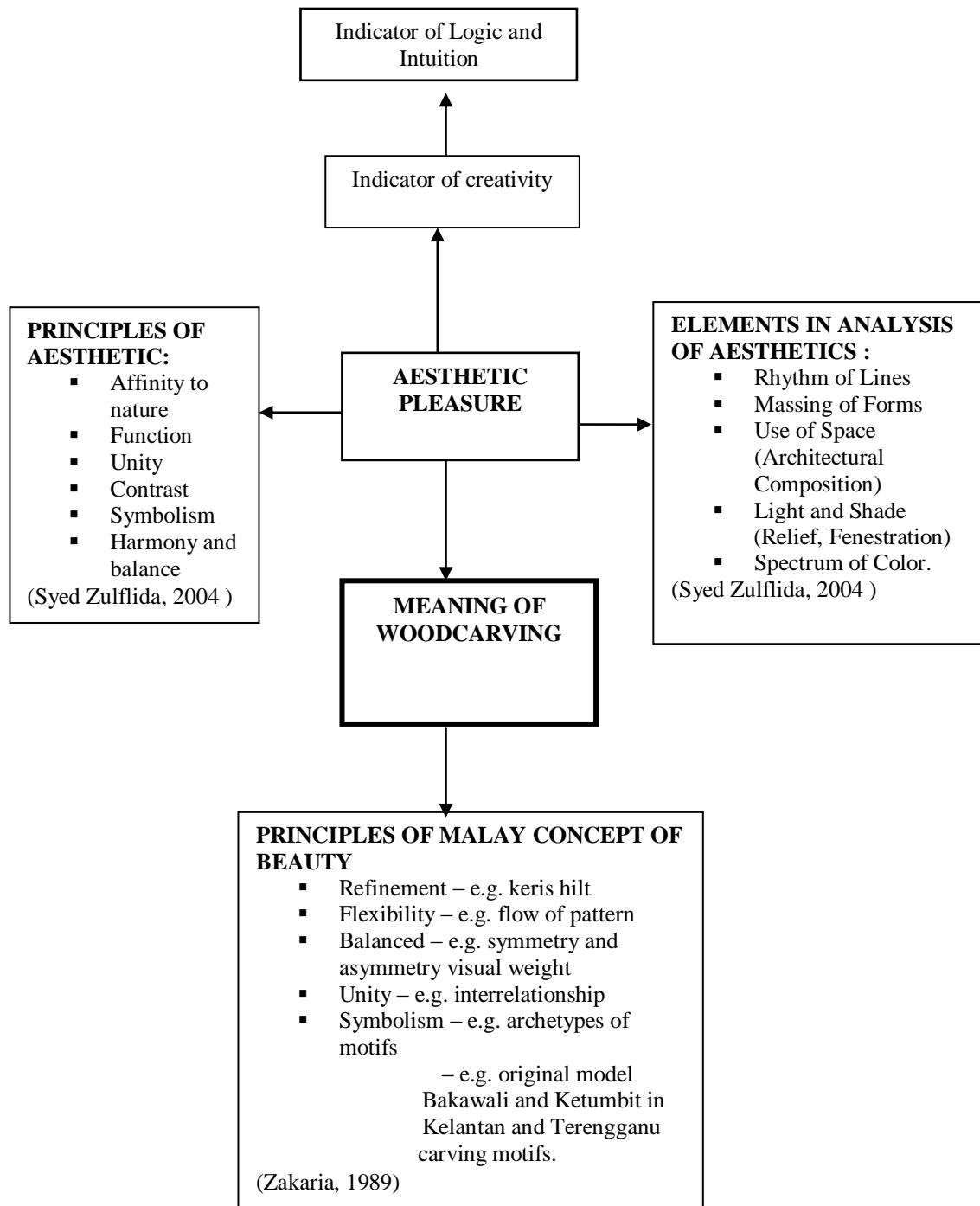


Figure 2.0: Summary of Interrelationship diagram of the principles and elements of aesthetics

Scope of Study and Research Parameters

This investigative study is confined to woodcarving components found in Malay timber houses. The traditional houses represent the skills and aesthetics of the traditional craftsmen and builders which have been passed down from generations to the following ones (Lee, 1987). The houses are normally decorated with excellent carvings with distinctive feature such as the ones at the external walls, over doors and windows to provide ventilation as well as decoration, and fascia board of gable end (Abdul Halim, 1987; Lee, 1987; Ismail 2002; Mohamad Tajuddin et al., 2005). Hence, the unit of analysis for this study is the traditional Malay woodcarvings in a form of architectural carved components, which are found in the East Coast houses located in Kelantan and Terengganu. There are plenty of carved components with inherent visual composition placed on the Malay timber houses from this region. Although some house designs are almost similar, the carving motifs and patterns of carved components found on the houses show the distinct character. Ismail (2001) postulates that three types of carved building components including structural, elemental and ornamental. These components are the observable carving components that characterize the architecture of this region. Several reasons determine the selection of the houses for this study. First, the Malay Carvings from the East Coast exhibit a wealth of woodcarvings and have obtained high levels of artistry and technique (Jamal, 1994). Second, Abdul Halim Nasir (1989) in his book highlights that the carvings from the East Coast do show marked differences from those found in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. This is due to the

fact that the traditional Malay woodcarvers from the East Coast states were strongly influenced by cultural values related to their traditional philosophies, which were inherited over the ages. Third, the art of carving has a special privilege in the East Coast buildings due to the significant number of skillful craftsmen who are still active in this craft industry (Hanafi, 2000).

The parameters to be measured are the attributes of woodcarvings and philosophy of craftsmen with particular emphasis on the carving motifs, placement of carved components, significance of the motifs and its contents. The selection of craftsmen for collecting information is limited to Malay background because the application of woodcarving itself involves the philosophical view based on Malay beliefs system.

Significance of Study

- The study would fill in the gap of knowledge regarding the existence of Malay woodcarving in timber architecture, especially in discovering its forms, uses and content.
- It is hoped that the study would reveal the importance of woodcarving as Malay heritage for art authorities in Malaysia as well as for the people who are concerned with the conservation of local arts especially Malay woodcarvings.
- In design perspective, the findings would also reveal the pattern of regularity in woodcarving to be utilized by the related disciplines and for future reference.

Research Design

The planning of this study is based on the background of the problem. Hence, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is thought to be appropriate to achieve the research

aims and answer research questions. The research will be carried out in four operational stages. The overall research structure is shown in Figure 3.0. The first stage involves the historical and theoretical review on placement of carved components in vernacular building, iconography of motifs, symbolic meanings and philosophy of craftsmen. Theoretical review covers basic understanding of the research parameters. Second stage requires the author to investigate the attributes of woodcarvings in Malay timber houses including motifs, shapes of components, compositional principles, types of incision and perforation, types of depictions, pattern of motifs, principal forms and design qualities. This is achieved by reviewing measured drawings from KALAM's collection belongs to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). This will lead to a certain understanding of the attributes, placements of carved components on identified houses, significances and meanings of motifs. The drawings will be analysed according to the aforementioned components by using visual analysis matrix. The sample of the matrix is shown in table 3.0. Stage 3 requires the author to triangulate the materials gathered from the second stage by interviewing the selected craftsmen and observing their works. During the in-depth interview the author will use a template that indicates the attributes of woodcarving. The template is used as an aid for the identification of woodcarvings by the craftsmen. This will facilitate the process of interview and field observation so that more materials could be gathered from the craftsmen. The sample of the template is shown in table 4.0. Stage 4 involves data analysis of the materials gathered in stage 3. Further analysis of the data using content analysis will elicit findings. Stage 5 concerns documentation of the findings.

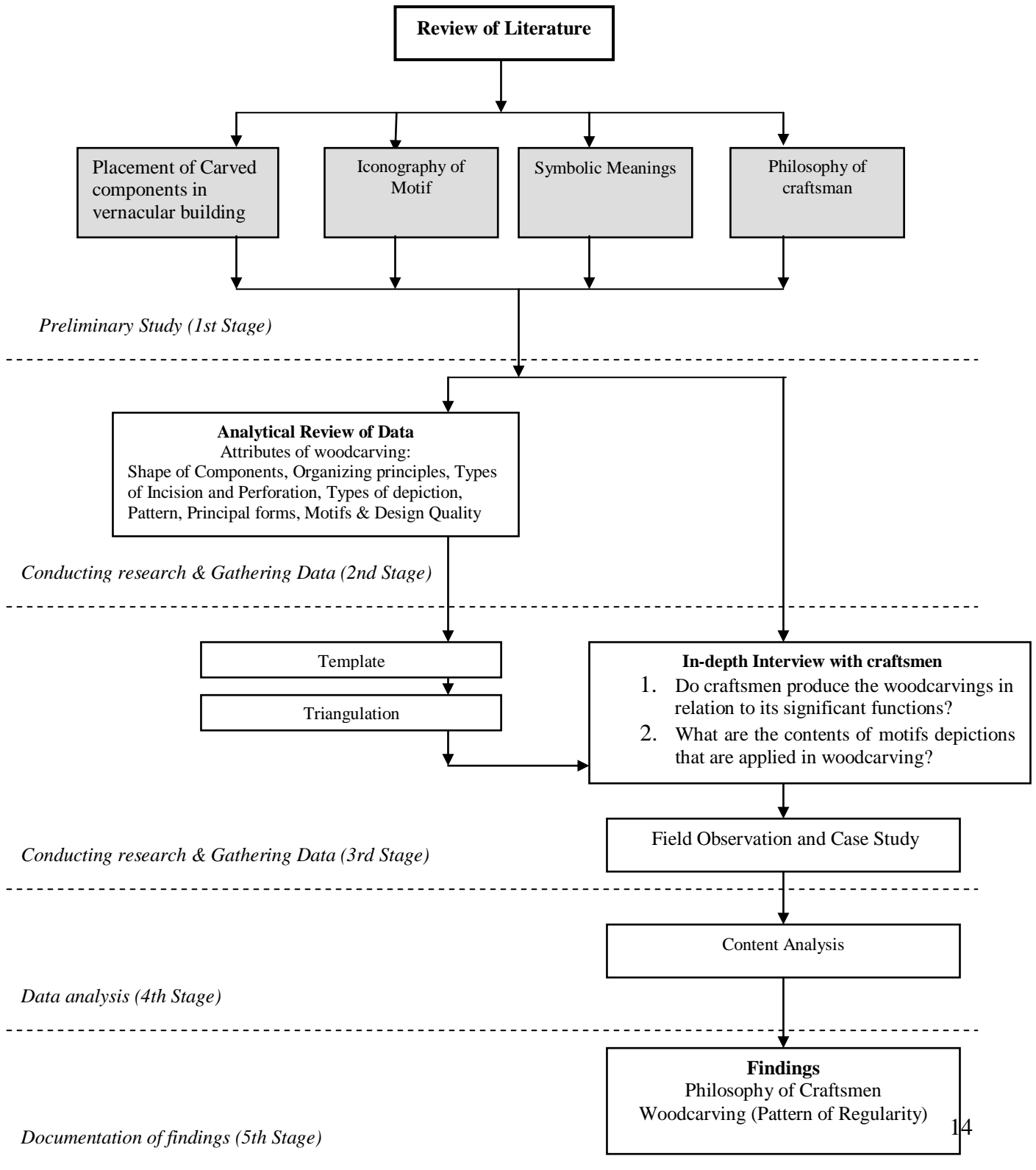
Expected Findings

The study reveals the most frequent patterns, popular form and design, and visual properties of woodcarvings that were used in a form of decorative as well as functional elements in the timber houses. Thus this study indicates the existence of pattern of regularity in the composition of woodcarving.

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PROPOSED RESEARCH SCHEDULE																		
YEAR	2007/2008						2008/2009						2009/2010					
SEMESTER	1-2						1-2						1-2					
MONTHS	2	4	6	8	10	12	2	4	6	8	10	12	2	4	6	8	10	12
U																		
F	Table 1.0: Proposed research schedule																	
problem																		
Research Proposal																		
Literature Review, theoretical framework, selection of research methodology																		
Analytical Review (1 st Stage)																		
Data collection and fieldwork (2 nd stage)																		
Data Analysis and Findings																		
Writing Draft																		
Final Report																		
Viva Voca and Correction																		

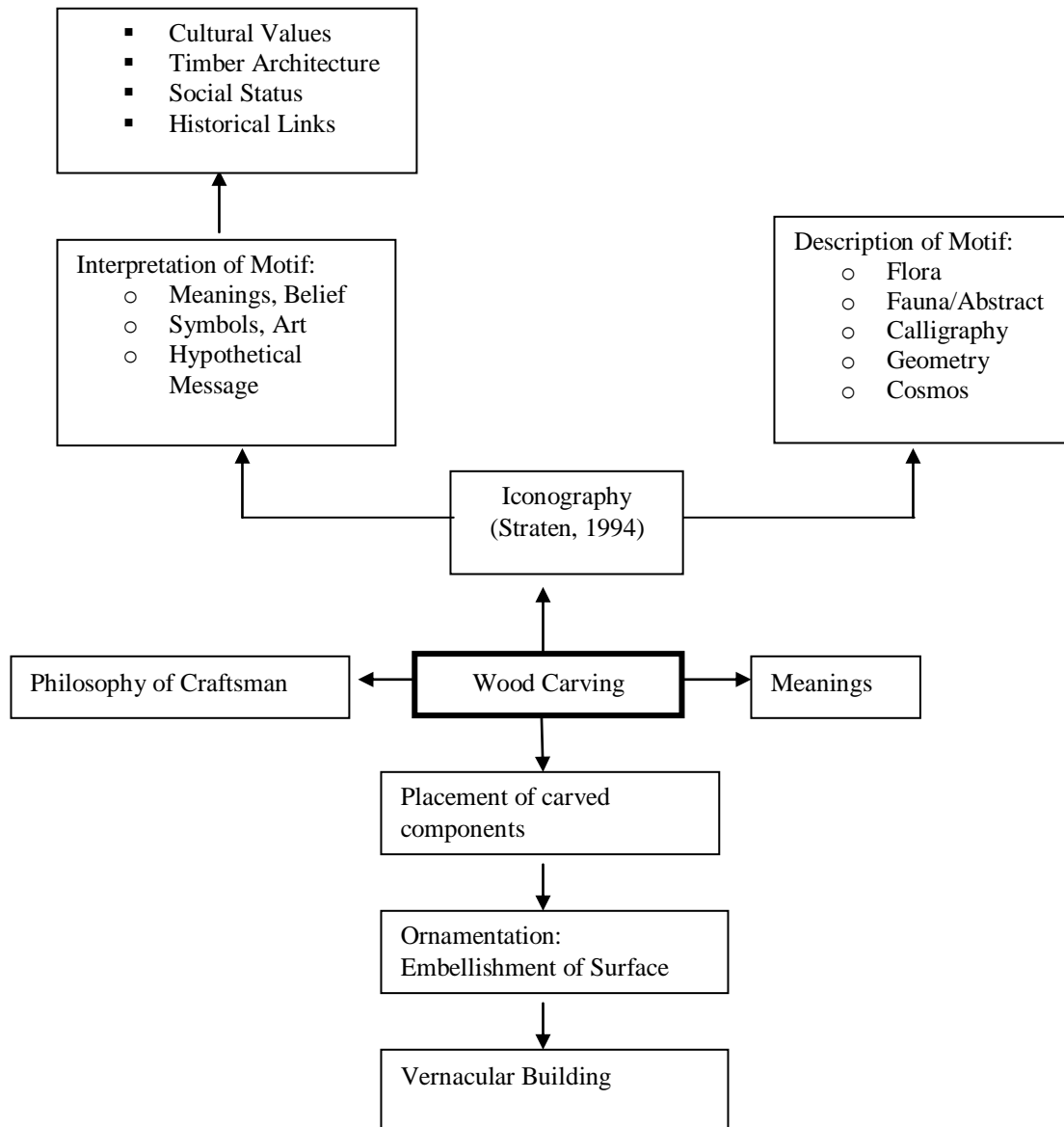


Figure 4.0: Research Parameters Diagram

Table 3.0: Summary of Research Gap

NO.	AUTHORS	IDENTIFIED AREA/DISCIPLINE	PARAMETER	POTENTIAL STUDY	SUGGESTED AREA OF STUDY
1	Abdul Halim (1985)	Malay architecture Heritage study	Traditional house form	Forms of mosque, palace and building Elements and components	Relationship of Building components and ornament
2	Abdul Halim (1987)	Malay art and architecture Heritage study	Forms of traditional woodcarvings in traditional buildings (Mosque, palace, houses)	Factors influence the woodcarving, carving techniques and instruments, craftsman	Philosophy of craftsman and meanings of woodcarving
3	Abdul Halim and Wan Hashim (1997)	Malay architecture Heritage study	Traditional house form	Forms of mosque, palace and building Elements and components	Relationship of Building components and ornament
4	Baer (1998)	Islamic Art	Decorative motif, meanings and formation	Detail study on Formal and Technical aspects	The art of Craftsmanship
5	Farish and Eddin (2003).	Malay visual Art	Traditional Woodcarving, spirit of wood, selection of wood, carvings in architecture and utilitarian objects (motifs, patterns, symbols)	Detail study on Formal and Technical aspects of woodcarving on Malay art and architecture	Detail study on Formal and Technical aspects of woodcarving and its placement on buildings
6	Gallop (2005)	Islamic and Malay art	Style of Manuscript (East Coast and Pattani)	Pattern of distribution of East Coast style on Malay arts	Pattern of distribution of East Coast style on Malay woodcarving
7	Gokhan (2002).	Vernacular Architecture	Effecting Factors and Values of vernacular architecture in Turkey, Education	Vernacular values and characteristics in interior architecture, urban design and applied art ad design	Vernacular values and characteristics in Malay art and architecture
8	Ismail (2001)	Malay art and vernacular architecture	Vernacular timber mosque, traditional Woodcarving, architectural carved components (ornamental, elemental, structural)	Architectural carved components in Vernacular timber houses, palaces or other buildings	Architectural carved components in Vernacular timber houses
9	Ismail (2002)	Malay art and architecture	Principal forms and shapes of carved components in vernacular houses	Architectural carved components in other vernacular buildings such as palaces or other public buildings	Detail study of carved components with respect to Technical aspects, placement, iconography, contents and meanings as well as philosophy of craftsmen Placement of carving in modern urban dwellings as functional element

NO.	AUTHORS	IDENTIFIED AREA/DISCIPLINE	PARAMETER	POTENTIAL STUDY	SUGGESTED AREA OF STUDY
10	Lim (1987)	Malay vernacular architecture	Indigenous House forms, design and layout	Typology of Mosque forms, design and layout	Typology vernacular values and characteristics of ornaments in interior and exterior architecture.
11	Mohamad et al., (2005)	Malay architecture Heritage and conservation study	Architecture of traditional Malay houses and palaces, regional styles	Nation wide survey for documentation of heritages and conservation study	Thorough survey for documentation of East Coast styles of beauty and craftsmanship
12	Raja Fuziah and Abdul Rahmani. (2000)	Malay Arts and Crafts Fine Art	Forms of traditional arts and crafts including woodcarving (basic patterns and carving techniques)	Detail study of crafts with respect to its functional and technical value	Detail study on architectural carved components in Vernacular timber houses
13	Muhammad Afandi Yahya. (1995).	Malay Architecture	Concept, symbolism in architecture and woodcarving (techniques, types of carvings and motif) of traditional Malay houses in Kelantan.	Concept, symbolism in architecture and woodcarving (techniques, types of carvings and motif) of traditional Malay houses or buildings in Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and ect.	Thorough survey for documentation of East Coast styles of beauty and craftsmanship
14	Othman (1995)	Islamic Art Malay Art	Symbolism in Malay Islamic arts, forms and motifs	Detail study of crafts with respect to its functional and technical value.	Detail study of crafts with respect to its functional and technical value.
15	Rahmah and Nor Azlin (2002).	Visual Art	Malay aesthetic in visual arts including carvings		Thorough survey for documentation of visuals arts
16	Rosnawati , (2005).	Malay art	Langkasuka Motif . evolution on Kris hilt and principles of composition of motifs	Detail study Langkasuka motifs in architectural carved components	Detail study Langkasuka motifs in architectural carved components of timber buildings
17	Straten (1994)	Visual Art	Iconography, symbols and meanings in visual art (paintings)	Iconography, symbols and meanings in Malay art	Iconography, symbols and meanings in woodcarving of vernacular architecture
18	Syed Ahmad Jamal (1994)	Visual Art	Types of carvings, aesthetic and craftsmanship	Philosophy of craftsmanship Principles of aesthetics	Philosophy of craftsmanship Principles of aesthetics in woodcarving
19	Winters (2002)	Art and architecture	Public architecture		

Table 4.0: Research Questions

RESEARH QUESTIONS	
Woodcarving	Craftsman
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do Malay craftsmen use design principles other than aforementioned as regulating factors in woodcarving? 2. Do they use the same principles for the placement of the woodcarving components in the vernacular buildings? 3. Do Malay craftsmen use the principles of organization, which provide them with structural guidelines for the ordering and treatment of visual elements (motifs) so that a predefined audience (beholder) recognizes and understands the message idea or intent of the woodcarving? 4. Do Malay woodcarvers also use or depend on their intuitive sense of visual order without the help of organizing principles or other organizing tools? 5. Do the applications of plant motifs in the traditional Malay wood carving as decorative components reflect the craftsman's preference of this elements since they are suitable and easily formed and styled according to the discretion and creativity of the craftsman? 6. Do the different house forms determine the similarities and differences of carving embellishment on traditional houses? 7. Why carved components are found more on non-structural building components and usually with intricate design? 8. Do Malay craftsmen select certain motif or design that is related to certain function? 9. Is there any other factor or factors besides those mentioned by the author that govern the physical form of woodcarving? 10. Do the placements of the ornamental carved components as building decoration reflect the craftsman's adherence to the specific style of Malay architecture? 11. What are the hidden meanings of repeated use of the same motifs? 12. Do all motifs depicted in decorative wood carving contain symbolic meaning? 13. Why and how do the woodcarvers transform the plant motifs that barely resemble their real-life image? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do the craftsmen produce the carved components for the sake of art, or for the sake of society or for showing one's submission to God? 2. Do the Malay craftsmen have certain mechanism that helps them transform nature (amorphous) into the art of woodcarving, which are unique and with high quality of craftsmanship? 3. Is it due to his individual style, creativity, sensitivity, and understanding/thought of nature or aesthetic consideration and experience? 4. Do the level of artistry and technical skill of the craftsman determines the distinct characteristics and features of woodcarving? 5. Does their strong affiliation to the traditional practice contribute to the distinct style and identity of the contemporary woodcarving? 6. Do the craftsmen understanding of the Malay aesthetic philosophy determines the distinct characteristics and features of contemporary woodcarving? 7. Do Malay craftsmen use design principles other than aforementioned as regulating factors in woodcarving? 8. Do Malay craftsmen use the principles of organization, which provide them with structural guidelines for the ordering and treatment of visual elements (motifs) so that a predefined audience (beholder) recognizes and understands the message idea or intent of the woodcarving? 9. Are these organizational or compositional principles perceived and practiced by the craftsman due to their logical thinking and intuition? 10. Do Malay woodcarvers also use or depend on their intuitive sense of visual order without the help of organizing principles or other organizing tools? 11. Do the applications of plant motifs in the traditional Malay wood carving as decorative components reflect the craftsman's preference of this elements since they are suitable and easily formed and styled according to the discretion and creativity of the craftsman? 12. Do the differences in the forms of carved components and the deployment and depiction of motifs reflect the craftsmen's individual interpretation and translation? 13. Do all motifs depicted in decorative wood carving contain symbolic meaning? 14. Does the craftsman's expressive use of tools in their works signify an

	<p>individual character or style?</p> <p>15. Do the applications of wood carving as building decoration reflect the craftsman's preference to the specific building elements and shapes?</p> <p>16. Does the use of design principles in the making of woodcarving reflects the craftsmen's genius and creative mind?</p> <p>17. Why and how do the woodcarvers transform the plant motifs that barely resemble their real-life image?</p> <p>18. Why do Malay craftsmen produce woodcarvings that have different degree of complexity or simplicity?</p> <p>19. Are the iconographical representations in harmony with the Malay's philosophy of beauty and aesthetics?</p>
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