

# Manifestation of Aesthetical Values in Traditional Design for JKKN 'Makyung' Costumes in Kelantan Based on Its Sociocultural System

Zolkipli Abdullah

Muhammad Faisal Ahmad  
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim Perak  
DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2023.14.02.312

## Abstract

In Kelantan, the traditional pattern that existed in the designing the costumes for 'Makyung' exhibits the combination of organic and geometric styles. This balances and reinforces every produced design. The use of aesthetical values in designing patterns with underlying decorations is directly created to mirror the activities within its social community through resources that reflect their customs and culture. Based on the displayed designs, we can learn one branch in JKKN's 'Makyung' performances in Kelantan. The research on the conservation of aesthetical values in designing traditional pattern for 'Makyung' costumes is a qualitative research, carried out descriptively through observing and analysing the performances, as well as interviewing the costume designer which entails the analysis of aesthetical and sociocultural values to explain the connection and role of the traditional designs in the costumes. The result of this study on the conservation of aesthetical values will be able to help the society to understand the development of ideas, creativity, aesthetical values, and meaning in every performance as well as the factors that support the process of designing traditional patterns for JKKN's 'Makyung' costumes in Kelantan based on its sociocultural system.

Keyword: Aesthetical values, Traditional Design

## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of traditional theatres shows a growing number of latest works which include various elements visual-wise and dramatical-wise in each performance. Those performances portray multiple themes, messages and plots, and they also projected contemporary visual ideas that translate the imagination of modern day artists. Global colour elements and space composition are also implemented. In other words, on such capacity, one investigation needs to be carried out to discuss on the creation of said works.

Pattern designation has a close relationship with any artwork that functions as decoration. The formation of the pattern is based on the strength of its structure or base, considering that patterns are arrangements in geometrical, organic shapes or the combination of both, sorted repetitively following its structure. They are a composition of small patterns that eventually form a bigger design. In costume design, traditional patterns have images or symbols that represent certain meanings. Motives and themes in costume design are the foundation in an artwork which then become the basic idea in delivering something, indirectly or abstractly.

Aesthetical values, as written by The Laing Gie (1976), are values that connect with everything that is included within the vast meanings of beauty. In this definition, beauty is generally similar to aesthetical values. When something is deemed beautiful, it does not only refer to one aspect like balance or subjective assessment, instead, aesthetical values in this research is defined as something that is related to the ability of 'Makyung' performance activists in visualising the themes in their work and their ability in using mediums to create costume patterns, in which creativity becomes a complete work to be staged and worn by 'Makyung' artists. Aesthetical values in this study are associated with the ability of the artists psychologically, sociology and philosophically visualising the designs in performances.

### Problem Statement

The mentioned problem statement can be understood that the conservation of aesthetical values, ideas, pattern designs and sociocultural system especially related to 'Makyung' performances are a union of aspects captivating

enough to be research objects. This research was conducted to investigate the problems of conserving aesthetical values in designing traditional costumes for 'Makyung' based on its sociocultural influence. The purpose of this research is to document, understand and define the conservation of aesthetical values in designing traditional 'Makyung' costumes based on the underlying meaning behind the costumes and performances.

Every performance that is born within a community always portrays the cultural influence practised by its citizens. Rohindi (1994) culture is powered by symbol systems and aesthetical values. This situation clarifies that every performance within a community will also adapt symbol systems in its sociocultural system. Aesthetical values and imagery in designing traditional costumes for 'Makyung' need to be preserved so they will not fade in time. The modern designs cause the loss of these traditional designs in 'Makyung' costumes, which in turn erasing the aesthetical values embedded within 'Makyung'.

What is unique about this almost-extinct traditional art is it is not only functional, but it also serves as the designer's 'speech' in the form of hidden codes that can only be understood by the audience if the context is clear. The mentioned codes are the aesthetical symbolisms, hidden within artistic objects in layers and function with context. Meanwhile, subjects that are used as motives in a branch of art will resurface in other fields of traditional arts because they are integrated and not boxed like recent trends. The result in conserving aesthetical values is also used to understand the connection between traditional designs of 'Makyung' costumes based on its sociocultural system and 'Makyung' performances by Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara (JKKN) in Kelantan.

### **Research Objectives**

To identify the elements in conserving aesthetical values in traditional designs of 'Makyung' costumes in Kelantan based on its sociocultural, to list the factors for modifying the traditional pattern, colours and processes in preserving the characteristics of Malays traditional costumes, and to analyse the aesthetical and sociocultural values in designing traditional patterns for 'Makyung' costumes in Kelantan based on its sociocultural system.

### **The Significance of Research**

To expand the understanding among individual and society in becoming activists on conserving aesthetical values in designing traditional 'Makyung' costumes, providing a new source for the communities involved in cultural performance arts related to aesthetical values in designing traditional 'Makyung' costumes and its relationship with sociocultural, and to explain to educators on the importance in appreciating aesthetical values when designing traditional 'Makyung' costumes in empowering the process of developing students in performance arts in Malaysia School of Arts and other universities.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is a pilot research to obtain a more complete data on the traditional design of 'Makyung' costumes in Kelantan which has been a part of the growth of traditional performance arts timeline in Malaysia. It aims to identify the factors of conserving aesthetical values in 'Makyung' costumes. The existence of a motive design follows through changes and development processes, meaning that they undergo a process called 'evolution'. Therefore, to search for meaning and symbolism behind a motive, we can use a theory conjured by Heine-Geldern (2016), in which seeing the present and traces it back to the past. The possibilities that can be looked out are names, shapes, designs, and finding similarities in other fields such as music, visual and performance arts.

Artworks in costume design are used as primary descriptive analysis by the researcher. This research uses multi-discipline approach which is the combination of sociocultural, art criticism and art aesthetics. The aesthetical values of each work are analysed based on creative process method (Laura Chapman, 1978) and art criticism proposed by Felman (1967) which covers multiple levels namely descriptive, formal analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

This research also involves analysing data from interviews and documentation such as costume samples, catalogues, materials from social media and in this level, the researcher uses purposive sampling to gain the depth and accuracy in information so as to not miss any important detail. An interview with 'Makyung' activist, Rosnan Rahman, the Director of Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara, Kelantan, costume designers, artists and museum curator in Kota Bharu as well as other authorities involved in 'Makyung' performances will be carried out.

Research samplings are categorised into:

- a. 'Makyung' activists (costume designers) who are actively involved in Kelantan for more than a decade, having a performance that is referred by authorities including universities and NGO.
- b. 'Makyung' activist (costume designer), Mister Rosnan Rahman in JKKN Kelantan a dedicated activist with a more than 10-year experience and had performed in national and international levels.
- c. 'Makyung' activists (costume designer) in Kelantan formally educated in traditional theatres at local institutions and other intellects that are involved actively in 'Makyung' performances.

## Hypothesis

Aesthetical values play a role in shaping a representation in conserving traditional designs of 'Makyung' costumes of JKKN in Kelantan based on its sociocultural system. 'Makyung' can also be discussed in certain methods that are not just about it being a 'traditional performance'.

## Discussion Traditional Design of Makyung Costumes

From the title of this research 'The Conservation of Aesthetical Values in Traditional Design for JKKN 'Makyung' Costumes in Kelantan Based on Its Sociocultural System', the researcher has discovered that there is no research that touches in depth on this topic.

Nevertheless, various books, journals, workshops, web articles, conference and researches carried out locally and globally that discussed about 'Makyung' in other aspects aside from the topic chosen in this research do exist. In general, studies on 'Makyung' focus on the documentation or discussion about its history, origin, development, structure, form, characteristics and the functions of its performances. There has been no study that focuses on the role and costume design related to 'Makyung' performances.

Covering and decorating human bodies are a combination of techniques and art that drive human to delve into various creative attempts to appear attractive, stylish, comfortable and suitable with the cultures' and races' tastes. According to Zaharah Osman (1996), improvising traditional designs in costumes is a remarkable effort in history. It results in captivating costume designs. From used products like kain sarung, it evolves into a prestigious and highly valuable aesthetic. Traditional Malay textile designs are a symbol of our national pride that has existed long ago until we gained independence. The Malay community in this region knows that Malay textiles are not only valued as utility resources, but also as trading product. Since the 19th century, the East Coast in Peninsula Malaysia is famously known as an important territory in producing Malay textiles such as batik, songket, and other woven fabric.

Md Nasir Ibrahim (2006) stated that a German philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten used the term 'aesthetic' for the first time in the year 1744. However, the term had existed since ancient times. Ralph Smith and Md Nasir Ibrahim also mentioned that Kant was the person who gave form and status to aesthetic through his statement in Critique of Judgment, while Hegel helped in the contents. (Md Nasir Ibrahim, 2006:37). Now, the term 'aesthetic' is seen in a wider context; no longer pointing towards the concept of beauty even though there are still efforts made to go in depth in understanding the concept of said beauty. Dobbs, in Md Nasir Ibrahim, (2006:36) refers the term 'aesthetic' as

"a type of active experience, finding and exploration". As a philosophy discipline, aesthetic is an effort to understand our experiences and the concepts that we often use when talking about any object that is alluring to us not for other purposes but for what that object is. (Md Nasir Ibrahim, 2006:37).

bnu Khalidun in Md Nasir Ibrahim and Iberahim Hassan mentioned that art is truth, beauty and kindness. Art contains aesthetical, ethical and logical characteristics. Aesthetics contain the elements of beauty, whether in arrangement and composition which beautifully portray the end product (Md Nasir Ibrahim, dan Iberahim Hassan, 2003:117). The concept of beauty, as explained by Md Nasir Ibrahim and Iberahim Hassan (2003), refers to the feelings of happiness, calm, satisfaction and appreciation. Happiness is felt when we see beautiful objects, often said to be "artsy", and in cultural context, the field that satisfies human's aesthetics is art. There are three aspects in the aesthetical theory proposed by Md Nasir Ibrahim and Iberahim Hassan (2003): formalistic related to the foundation of design; expression connected to conveying feelings; and psychological (human and art psychologies). Looking at these three aspects, they depict beauty in mystical, emotional and intellectual ways (Md Nasir Ibrahim dan Iberahim Hassan, 2003:120).

Ghouse Nasuruddin, on the other hand, talks about the types and usage of 'Makyung' music in the book Muzik Tradisional Malaysia (2002), along with Tan Sooi Beng who touches on music in his book The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk, and Syncretic Traditions (Soas Musicology Series) (2004). Ghouse also documented in depth on the 'Makyung' motion and acting in Teater Tradisional Melayu (2009). In every 'Makyung' performance, props, costumes and special makeup are must-haves to increase the wow-factor. The characters' costumes are complete and expensive. The important characters in 'Makyung' are given special names and a complete set of costumes in every story. Culture represents the identity of a nation worldwide. As the culture evolves, so does its artistic values. The identity of a nation needs to be maintained and they preserve the culture from various aspects; costume being one of them.

Effindi debates on creativity and the choreography in his dissertation entitled Teater Melayu Makyung : Kajian Kreativiti Koreografi (2012). Meanwhile Rosdeen touches on the character and characteristics of a peran, a role in 'Makyung' performances. A thesis on Peran Mak Yong : pelakon dan watak (2005) also talks about the mystical

and magical aspects of a peran. Old and Young Peran wear every day clothes. Peran wear sarong without shirts, and tied on their waists is a piece of cloth that can also be worn on their heads as semutar which functions as a head cover or to wipe their sweat, or to cover their chests. Old and Young Peran then wear round-neck, short sleeves shirts which are suitable to cover actors' aurat from being seen by female audience. Sarong is changed to trousers made from black-coloured cotton. Peran also wear cloth (usually kain batik or kain pelikat) tied to their hips, functioning as sampung.

Hatta Azad Khan presented a paperwork on Eksplorasi dan Lestari Seni Tradisi (2010) in 2010's Makyung Exploration Conference. Hatta Azad Khan discusses on the fate and future of 'Makyung' and how to preserve it. In the same conference, A.S Hardy presented Falsafah Pengurusan dan Persembahan Makyung (2010) which touched on the influence of how 'Makyung' plays out in palaces, rituals and commercials.

Spreading information on this traditional art has grown due to the inclusion of researches coming from Western scholars such as Amin Sweeney (1994), Mary Beth Osnes (1992), Mubin Sheppard (1983) and many more. They see traditional arts from their perspectives as how Winstedt (1951) talked about the relationship between mystical realms (shaman) and 'Makyung' in his book *The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva, and Sufi*.

The sociocultural system in this study refers to the traditional culture approach as a system that guides the society in life apart from being subjects and analysing tools which helps to comprehend the arising questions and connections on the traditional designs for 'Makyung' costumes within the community. Cultural approach is used as a research that consists of elements that function and operate in a systematic way. The meaning of culture refers to individual, social and cultural aspects from human lives as elements that serve as reciprocal guidance and power (Suprlan, 1985).

Pakyung and Young Pakyung wear the same clothing, except their short-sleeved shirts are in black or navy blue. However, in recent performances, they no longer use only two colours like ancient times ever since their performances are staged in halls with twinkling, radiant lights. Sampung is worn on their waists, and bengkung is tied on top of the sampung around the waist to cover their hips. A small keris named 'Keris Sempena Berang' is inserted underneath the bengkung on the left side. It's a symbol of the king's clothes.

Costumes for Makyung and Makyung Puteri are silk, long-sleeved long kebaya. The front of the kebaya is decorated with gold and diamond brooches. Their sarong is also made of silk, covering their ankles, tied with a belt. Their costumes during Seri Temenggong Group were changed from chest-covering clothes worn with long silk sarong. The material was also changed from golden kain brokat (during Primadona Khatijah Awang time) to a high-quality silk with flowery motives. The costumes for 'Makyung' performers are sponsored by Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara Kelantan. In the earlier days of 'Makyung' performances, the maids' clothes were more of showing their status in the story, wearing plain kebaya and baju kurung without any pattern, in standard colours. As time passed, their costumes evolved from golden brokat and tight chest-covering clothes to more modest costumes following Malay customs, and in some performances, hijab is also a norm to them.

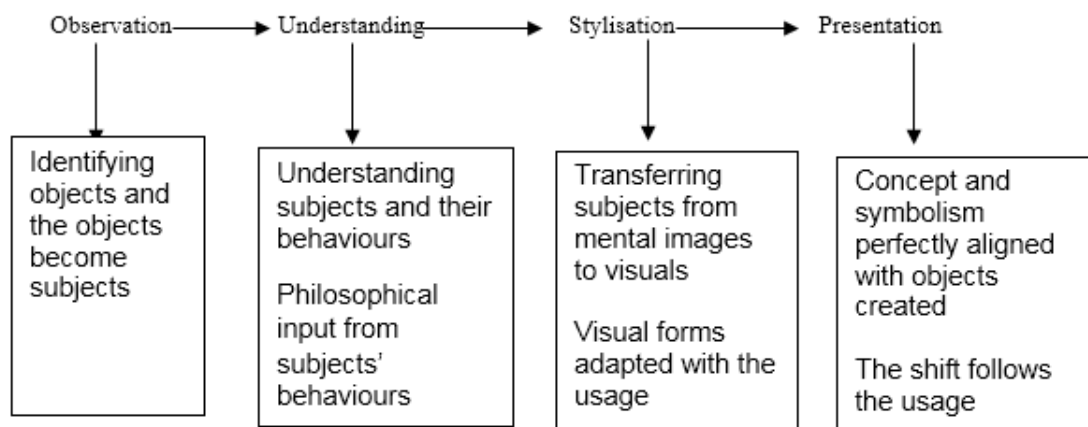
Sociocultural value is an abstract concept on the core problem that is so significant and valuable in life. As mentioned by Abdul Halim Husain (2014), culture is a content of concepts such as aesthetical values, beliefs, symbols and languages, behaviour, sociocultural system within a society, technological resources and the society's needs which develop into identities that evidently distinguish them from other communities. These sociocultural values will form an identity based on individual expressions from certain communities that exist on artefact, whether it is an artwork or other works in that individual's life. The sociocultural values in this research cover the theme envisioned by the designer and visualising it into Malaysia's sociocultural realm and its relevance with the current sociocultural practises.

## CONCLUSION

The growth of 'Makyung' along with the evolution of costumes and accessories worn by 'Makyung' performers are heavily influenced by religion, politics, social, economy and culture within the country's environment. The changes in their costumes and accessories are inevitable. They are actually a form of adaptation so that 'Makyung' performances stay relevant among the audience and become a cultural legacy to be preserved for the newer generations to refer to.

The existence of a motif design has surely gone through the process of change and development, which means it follows through a process commonly known as transformation. Traditional folks have their own concepts on the relationship between human beings and other nature components. However, before overseeing the symbolism on traditional arts, bear in mind about their behaviour and how they acted upon their environment (Najib Dawa, 2008).

Figure 1 below shows the conceptual space in creating designs



(Source: Branginsky,1998)

In developing countries, the evolution of culture must parallel with the transformation through education, research and the relationship between regional countries. This is the primary move to protect and preserve the cultures in Malaysia. This research is very important for activists like designers, choreographers, dancers, and academicians to dignify art through costume care, culture, shapes, and aesthetical values that exist in traditional dance costumes. As time changes, 'Makyung' traditional costumes are forgotten and disappeared. Thus, this research aims to appreciate the aesthetical values of its costumes inside out, as well as to keep, preserve and prepare the costumes so they will not fade in time. Traditional dance costumes that are presented in the castle have high artistic and aesthetical values. If we, as local citizens are not actively aware on this subject, who else should we put the responsibility on? In addition to the emergence of modern and outside influence in fashion, traditional clothing like 'Makyung' costumes are quickly forgotten. If local arts are not fought for, their quality will continue to drop and because of that, newer generations are highly oblivious to the cost in making 'Makyung' traditional costumes.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the strategies and execution of National Cultural Act in restoring, preserving, and developing cultures towards strengthening the foundation of national culture through studies, development, education, expansion, and cultural relationships (Negara, 2015). Traditional dance costumes that are presented in the castle have high artistic and aesthetical values. If we, as local citizens are not actively aware on this subject, who else should we put the responsibility on? In addition to the emergence of modern and outside influence in fashion, traditional clothing like 'Makyung' costumes are quickly forgotten. If local arts are not fought for, their quality will continue to drop and because of that, newer generations are highly oblivious to the cost in making 'Makyung' traditional costumes. In conclusion, it is also hoped that this research can walk alongside the attempts made by various authorities to strengthen the aesthetical values embedded in 'Makyung' costumes to ensure that they are thoroughly conserved, hence uplifting the country's artistic legacy in the eye of the world.

### Acknowledgement

This paper is based on the research project entitled 'The Conservation of Aesthetical Values in Traditional Design for JKKN 'Makyung' Costumes in Kelantan Based on Its Sociocultural System'. The authors would like to extend their gratitude to the Research Management and Innovation Centre (RMIC), Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) for the University Research Grants (code: 2021-0002-106-01) that helped fund (RM 9,970.00) the research.

### Corresponding Authors

Zolkipli bin Abdullah  
 Faculty of Music and Performing Arts  
 Sultan Idris Education University  
 35900 Tanjong Malim  
 Perak, Malaysia  
[zolkipli@fmsp.upsi.edu.my](mailto:zolkipli@fmsp.upsi.edu.my)

## REFERENCES

1. Aronson, A. (2017). *The routledge companion to scenography*. New York: The Routledge
2. Barret, M. (1982). *Art education: a strategy for course design*. London: Heineman Educational Books.
3. Davis, J. (2016). *Foundation of design*. Arizona: Tempe Digital LLC
4. Ghulam. S.Y. (2004). *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia, Performing Arts, Volume 8*. Singapura: Archipelago Press.
5. Ghouse. (2009). *Teater Tradisional Melayu*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka:Kuala Lumpur
6. Jamal, S.A. (1992). *Rupa dan Jiwa*. Kuala Lumpur. Dewan Bahasa Pustaka.