



PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL MALAY WOOD  
CARVING AS CULTURAL HERITAGE IN NORTH  
EASTERN STATES OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The art of wood carving in Malaysia has been inherited from the old generation of carvers since 16th century. Wood Carving is part of Malay socio-cultural elements which is protected and recognized as one of national important craft that has heritage significance. This wood work should be given greater emphasis by being promoted as one of sources for economic growth .Unfortunately, there are some changes of traditions in the making of Malay wood carving by the young generation in Malaysia. These include the transformation of motif from traditional to contemporary motif. There are lack of data and literatures on the preservation of the wood carving leading to some difficulties in collecting information about this wood work. Therefore, this study aims to recommend a guideline for the preservation method of traditional Malay wood carving of north eastern state of Malay Peninsular Malaysia in sustaining its cultural heritage value. The first objective of this study is to examine the characteristics and properties of wood carving that reflect the craftsmanship of Traditional Malay wood carving which signify it as cultural heritage. The second objective of this study is to determine the method of preserving wood carving as cultural heritage and the third objective of this study is to recommend guidelines of preserving wood carving as one of cultural heritage. Series of semi-structured interviews with expert wood carvers, wood carving collectors and few authorities involved in this area were conducted to obtain the primary data. Norhaiza Nordin and Wan Mustafa, who are master wood carvers and also collectors of wood carving artworks were interviewed to obtain their expert opinions. The researcher also interviewed Puan Rosnawati Othman, a custodian of Akademik Nik Rashidin (ANR) which have vast collection of wood artefacts and preserved them for years. All interviewees are from north eastern states of Peninsular Malaysia. The interviews focused on characteristics of Malay traditional wood carving and also its preservation techniques. The researcher conducted a visual analysis in the selected of 30 wood carving samples to document the characteristics of traditional wood carving. The study found that heritage value on carving components can be determined thorough its visual and physical characteristics. These characteristics determine the distinctiveness of the carved components that has become the key determinants to their heritage attributes resulting to significant pieces of work. The study suggests that the art of wood carving should be preserved in terms of its tangible characteristics and also intangible characteristics. The research describes the properties and characteristics of Traditional Malay wood carving based on visual values and craftsmanship and continuity of the craft requires the safeguarding efforts among the young generation of woodcarvers and related parties. Future research is necessary to explore on detail the techniques of wood carving and its process of production to ensure the sustainability of this art as a local heritage product.

## خلاصة البحث

إن فن نحت الخشب في ماليزيا موروث من الجيل القديم من النحاتين منذ القرن السادس عشر. إنها جزء من العنصر الاجتماعي والثقافي الماليزي الذي يتم حمايته والاعتراف به كواحد من الحرف الوطنية الهامة التي لها أهمية تراثية. يجب التركيز بشكل أكبر من خلال الترويج له باعتباره أحد مصادر النمو الاقتصادي. لسوء الحظ، هناك بعض التغييرات في التقاليد في صنع النحت الملايوي للخشب من قبل جيل الشباب. وتشمل هذه من اختراع من عزز نحت الخشب التقليدية في ماليزيا. هناك نقص في البيانات والأدبيات حول القطاعات الحرفية مما يؤدي إلى بعض الصعوبات في جمع بيانات دقيقة حول هذا القطاع. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التوصية بمبادئ توجيهية لطريقة الحفاظ على النحت الملايوي التقليدي للخشب في شمال شرق ولاية الملايو في شبه الجزيرة الماليزية في الحفاظ على قيمة التراث الثقافي. الهدف الأول من هذه الدراسة هو دراسة خصائص نحت الخشب التي تعكس براعة نحت خشب الملايو التقليدي الذي يدل عليه كثرة ثقافي. والهدف الثاني من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد طريقة الحفاظ على نحت الخشب كثرة ثقافي والهدف الثالث من هذه الدراسة هو التوصية بمبادئ توجيهية للحفاظ على نحت الخشب كثرة للتراث الثقافي. وأجريت سلسلة من المقابلات شبه المقننة مع النحاتين الخبراء من الخشب وجامعي نحت الخشب وعدد قليل من السلطات المعنية في هذا المجال للحصول على البيانات الأولية. كان كل من نورهايزا نوردين ووان مصطفى، اللذان كانا يتقنان في المنحوتات الخشبية وأيضاً جامعي الأعمال الفنية للنحت على الخشب، من المقابلات معاً للحصول على آراء الخبراء. كما أجرى الباحث مقابلة مع السيدة روسناواتي عثمان، وهي أمانة للأكاديمية نيك راشد (ANR) الذي يضم مجموعة كبيرة من المصنوعات الخشبية ويحفظها لسنوات. كان جميع الذين تمت مقابلتهم من ولايات شمال شرق شبه جزيرة ماليزيا. وركزت المقابلات على خصائص نحت الخشب التقليدي في الملايو وكذلك تقنيات الحفظ الخاصة به. وأجرى الباحث تحليلاً بصرياً لتوثيق خصائص نحت الخشب التقليدي لدى الملايو. وجدت الدراسة أن قيمة التراث على

مكونات النحت يمكن أن تحدد بدقة خصائصها البصرية والفيزيائية. وتحدد هذه الخصائص تميز المكونات المنحوتة التي أصبحت من المحددات الرئيسية لسماقتها التراثية مما أدى إلى قطع كبيرة من العمل. تقترح الدراسة أنه ينبغي الحفاظ على فن نحت الخشب من حيث خصائصه الملموسة وكذلك خصائصه غير الملموسة. يصف البحث خصائص نحت الخشب التقليدي الملايوي، والقيم، والحرفية، واستمرارية العمل الفني بين جيل الشباب. تكون البحوث المستقبلية ضرورية لاستكشاف تقنيات نحت الخشب بالتفصيل وعملية إنتاجها لضمان استدامة هذا الفن كمنتج محلي.

## APPROVAL PAGE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| Abstract.....           | ii   |
| Abstract in Arabic..... | iii  |
| Approval Page.....      | v    |
| Declaration Page.....   | vi   |
| Copyright.....          | vii  |
| Acknowledgements.....   | viii |
| List of Tables.....     | xii  |
| List of Figures.....    | xiii |

## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| 1.1 Background of research.....   | 1  |
| 1.2 Problem Statement.....        | 2  |
| 1.3 Research Aim.....             | 5  |
| 1.4 Research Questions.....       | 5  |
| 1.5 Research Objectives.....      | 6  |
| 1.6 Research gap.....             | 6  |
| 1.7 Scope of research.....        | 7  |
| 1.8 Significant of research.....  | 8  |
| 1.9 Organization of research..... | 9  |
| 1.10 Chapter summary.....         | 11 |

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 2.0 Introduction.....   | 12 |
| 2.1 Cultural heritage.....  | 12 |
| 2.1.1 Wood carving as cultural heritage.....                              | 14 |
| 2.2 Criteria of cultural heritage assets.....                             | 14 |
| 2.3 Preservation of cultural heritage.....                                | 16 |
| 2.4 Meaning of Preservation.....  | 17 |
| 2.4.1 Preservation of Heritage in Malaysia context.....                   | 18 |
| 2.5 The art of wood carving.....  | 19 |
| 2.5.1 History and development of traditional Malay wood carving... ..     | 20 |
| 2.5.2 Types of wood used for carving.....                                 | 21 |
| 2.5.3 Physical properties of traditional Malay wood carving.....          | 23 |
| 2.5.3.1 Forms of wood carvings.....                                       | 23 |
| 2.5.3.2 Types of motifs and patterns.....                                 | 26 |
| 2.5.3.3 Principal motifs in the Malay wood carving.....                   | 27 |
| 2.5.3.4 Abstract Motifs and philosophical in the Malay wood Carvings..... | 29 |
| 2.5.3.5 Characteristics of Plant-based Motif.....                         | 30 |
| 2.5.3.6 Types of plant motif in Malay wood carving.....                   | 32 |
| 2.5.4 Patterns and Techniques of wood carvings.....                       | 34 |
| 2.5.5 Categories of wood carving and their techniques.....                | 35 |
| 2.6 Review on related studies.....  | 37 |

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| 2.7 Theoretical framework..... | 43 |
| 2.8 Chapter summary.....       | 46 |

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 3.0 Introduction.....   | 47 |
| 3.1 Research approaches in the studies of traditional wood carving and other related studies..... | 47 |
| 3.2 Research framework.....   | 50 |
| 3.3 Research design.....  | 50 |
| 3.3.1 Theoretical approach.....   | 53 |
| 3.3.1.1 Reviewing the available related literature.....   | 54 |
| 3.3.2 Observation and visual analysis.....  | 55 |
| 3.3.3 Semi structured interview.....  | 57 |
| 3.3.3.1 Pilot interviews.....   | 59 |
| 3.3.3.2 Face to face Interview structure.....   | 60 |
| 3.3.3.3 Stages of semi-structured interview research.....   | 62 |
| 3.3.4 Data Analysis.....  | 64 |
| 3.3.4.1 Descriptive Analysis.....   | 64 |
| 3.3.5 Result and Finding.....   | 65 |
| 3.3.6 General conclusion and Recommendation.....  | 65 |
| 3.4 Chapter summary.....  | 67 |

**CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 4.0 Introduction.....   | 68  |
| 4.1 Data collection.....  | 68  |
| 4.1.1 Interview of expert wood carvers and authorities.....   | 88  |
| 4.2 Characteristic of Malay traditional wood carving.....   | 71  |
| 4.2.1 Visual analysis of the selected wood carvings.....  | 71  |
| 4.3 Interview with three experts wood carvers .....   | 88  |
| 4.3.1 Design motif of wood carving.....   | 89  |
| 4.3.2 Types of wood used for the wood carving.....  | 94  |
| 4.3.3 Techniques of carving.....  | 96  |
| 4.4 The process of wood carving production.....   | 101 |
| 4.5 Findings of research.....   | 109 |
| 4.5.1 visual characteristics and physical properties of old traditional Malay wood signify it as cultural heritage component..... | 109 |
| 4.5.2 The methods used to craft the traditional Malay wood carving.....   | 110 |
| 4.5.3 Preservation of traditional Malay wood carvings as cultural heritage in Malaysia.....                                       | 111 |
| 4.5.3.1 Physical preservation.....  | 111 |
| 4.5.3.2 Continuity of the arts of wood Carving.....   | 112 |
| 4.5.3.3 awareness among public.....   | 114 |
| 4.6 Wood carving as cultural Heritage inMalaysia.....   | 114 |
| 4.7 Chapter summary.....  | 115 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION</b>   |     |
| 5.0 Introduction.....  | 116 |
| 5.1 Summary of finding .....   | 116 |
| 5.1.1 Characteristic of Malay wood carving in peninsular Malaysia.   | 117 |
| 5.1.2 Techniques of preserving wood carving in peninsular<br>Malaysia carved components as cultural heritage by wood<br>Carvers and related parties..... | 119 |
| 5.1.3 Recommendation of the criteria and guidelines of<br>Preserving Wood carving as one of cultural heritage in<br>Malaysia.....                        | 120 |
| 5.1.4 Preservation technique of wooden artefacts by International<br>Standard (ICOMOS).....  | 122 |
| 5.1.5 Different And Similarities Between Guidelines Of Preserving<br>Wood Carving from The Local And International<br>Standard.....                      | 123 |
| 5.2 Limitation of research .....   | 125 |
| 5.3 Implication of research.....   | 126 |
| 5.4 Recommendation of research.....  | 127 |
| 5.5 Chapter Summary.....   | 128 |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>   | 129 |
| <b>GLOSSARY.....</b>   | 133 |
| <b>APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTION IN MALAY.....</b>  | 134 |
| <b>APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW QUESTION IN ENGLISH.....</b>   | 136 |
| <b>APPENDIX III: SAMPLES OF INVENTORY CHECKLIST.....</b>   | 138 |
| <b>APPENDIX IV: FIRST CONFERENCE PAPER.....</b>  | 140 |
| <b>APPENDIX V: SECOND CONFERENCE PAPER.....</b>  | 149 |
| <b>APPENDIX VI: THIRD CONFERENCE PAPER.....</b>  | 154 |
| <b>APPENDIX VII: FOURTH CONFERENCE PAPER.....</b>  | 158 |
| <b>APPENDIX VIII: PICTURES DURING SITE OBSERVATION.....</b>  | 168 |

## LIST OF TABLES

|           |  |     |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Table 2.1 | Categories and Techniques of Traditional Malay Wood Carving                            | 34  |
| Table 2.2 | Summary of Related Studies   | 37  |
| Table 3.1 | The Related Method Used by Other Researchers in Collecting Their Data                  | 46  |
| Table 3.2 | Techniques Employed Accordingly to The Research Objectives                             | 49  |
| Table 3.3 | List of Respondents Been Interviewed by The Researcher                                 | 56  |
| Table 4.1 | Profile of The 30 Samples of Wood Carvings   | 70  |
| Table 4.2 | Visual Characteristics of The 30 Samples of Wood Carvings                              | 76  |
| Table 4.3 | Characteristics of Malay Traditional Wood Carving as Cultural Heritage                 | 82  |
| Table 4.4 | Transformation of Floral Surrounding into Wood Carving Motif                           | 89  |
| Table 4.5 | The Production Process of Wood Carving Object  | 106 |
| Table 5.1 | Different And Similarity of Preserving Techniques by Local And International Standard. | 122 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|             |   |    |
|-------------|---|----|
| Figure 1.1  | Summary of Thesis Structure                                       | 9  |
| Figure 2.1  | Wall Panel as 2 Dimensional Carving                               | 22 |
| Figure 2.2  | ‘Jebak Puyuh’ as 3 Dimensional Carving                            | 22 |
| Figure 2.3  | Door Panel as 2 Dimensional Carving                               | 23 |
| Figure 2.4  | ‘Congkak’ as 3 Dimensional Carving                                | 23 |
| Figure 2.5  | Motif ‘Lebah Gantung’ on Railing of Traditional Timber House      | 24 |
| Figure 2.6  | Floral Motif on Door Panels That Consist of Five Sources in Plant | 26 |
| Figure 2.7  | Geometric Pattern Used as Railing at Mosque Building.             | 27 |
| Figure 2.8  | Example of Element Used in Composition of Motif in Carving        | 29 |
| Figure 2.9  | Example of Element Used in Composition of Motif in Carving        | 29 |
| Figure 2.10 | Cultural Heritage Components of Traditional Malay Wood Carving    | 41 |
| Figure 2.11 | Theoretical Framework of Research                                 | 43 |
| Figure 3.1  | Different Phases of Data Collection in This Research.             | 50 |
| Figure 3.2  | Step of Data Collection for Analyzing 30 Samples of Wood Carving  | 54 |
| Figure 3.3  | Semi Structured Interview Steps                                   | 57 |
| Figure 3.4  | The Structured of Interview Question Based on Research Objectives | 58 |
| Figure 3.5  | Stages of Semi-Structured Interview Research                      | 60 |
| Figure 3.6  | Research Framework Diagram  | 64 |
| Figure 4.1  | Method of Production Traditional Malay Wood Carving               | 84 |

|             |   |     |
|-------------|---|-----|
| Figure 4.2  | Wood Cross Section for Cengal   | 85  |
| Figure 4.3  | Topics Discussion in Interview Session  | 87  |
| Figure 4.4  | One of Geometric Pattern from Wan Mustafa Artworks at Ulul Albab Mosque, Besut. | 90  |
| Figure 4.5  | Calligraphy Motif on Panels of Door Made by Wan Po                              | 91  |
| Figure 4.6  | Example of Calligraphy As Motif   | 91  |
| Figure 4.7  | Sample of Chengal Wood  | 93  |
| Figure 4.8  | Sample of Jackfruit Wood  | 93  |
| Figure 4.9  | Sample of Nyatuh Wood   | 93  |
| Figure 4.10 | A Hilt Dagger with Carving Decoration   | 94  |
| Figure 4.11 | Window Panel as Air Ventilation   | 94  |
| Figure 4.12 | Door as House Structure with Carving  | 95  |
| Figure 4.13 | 2 Dimensional Object of Carving   | 95  |
| Figure 4.14 | 3 Dimensional Object of Carving   | 96  |
| Figure 4.15 | Perforation Techniques in Wood Carving  | 97  |
| Figure 4.16 | Incision Techniques in Wood Carving   | 97  |
| Figure 4.17 | Larik or Laying Techniques in Wood Carving                                      | 97  |
| Figure 4.18 | Carving Motif to Produce Cookies Pattern/Shape                                  | 98  |
| Figure 4.19 | Reconstruct Motif Design on Tracing Paper                                       | 99  |
| Figure 4.20 | Directly Construct Motif Design on Wood Plate                                   | 99  |
| Figure 4.21 | ‘Tebuk Tembus’ Technique using Screw Saw Machine.                               | 100 |
| Figure 4.22 | Tools Used in Carving Process   | 101 |
| Figure 4.23 | Wooden Hammer from Jackfruit Wood as One Of Main Tools in Carving.              | 101 |
| Figure 4.24 | Example of Ukiran Larik   | 101 |
| Figure 4.25 | Example of Ukiran With Silat  | 102 |

|                |   |     |
|----------------|---|-----|
| Figure 4.26    | Sanding Process Using Sand Paper                                  | 102 |
| Figure 4.27    | Using A Compasses Machine to Clean Up The Unneeded Wood Harsh     | 103 |
| Figure 4.28(a) | Paint The Surface of Wood Carving Using Shellac                   | 104 |
| Figure 4.28(b) | Paint The Surface of Wood Carving Using Shellac for Several Times | 104 |
| Figure 4.29    | Carving Object were Keep in A Room With Artificial Lighting.      | 104 |
| Figure 4.30    | Used Grater to Remove The Paint                                   | 105 |
| Figure 4.31    | The Production Process of Wood Carving Object                     | 107 |

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

Wood carving is defined as a formed of art by using a cut out technique on a thick plank with a specific design motif and different depths of incision (Norhaiza, 2008). Ismail Said (2001, 2002, and 2004) posits that wood carving is an art of partially removing wood from a board or a plank following specific motifs and orders. Hamdzun Haron et.al. (2014) stated that wood carving is an activity to tear off the wood surface by using various types of tools such as carving chisels and knives. Meanwhile, Neha et.al. (2007) states wood carving is an art that has a combination of aesthetic with utility. Wood carving is a traditional art that is manifested from the local tradition and customs .It is among the prominent crafts done by Malay craftsmen to represent their observation on beauty of nature surrounding (Nursuriani & Ismail, 2013). This art are manifestation of artistic qualities and skillfulness possessed by the traditional craftsmen (Zumahiran & Ismail, 2010). The abundance of timbers in the rainforest of Peninsular Malaysia become a reason the Malay practice to produce the wood carving. (Ismail Said, 2005).The wood carvings are usually produced for utilitarian purpose and as decorative elements. They are two types of wood carving product, namely contemporary and traditional wood carving (Norhaiza Nordin, 2010). The application of wood carving in architecture contributes an identity of nation for particular country (Farish and Eddin, 2003).

Most of wood carvers in Malaysia come from East Coast state (Hamzah Zainudin, 2010). Nowadays, the industry of Malay wood carving have a competition with artificial wood carving from local and foreign industries. For examples there are

competition from Indonesia carving artwork that mostly enter to Malaysia market. According to Zuraini, Noor Hanita, & Norazah (2015) less demanding on traditional wood carving products occur due to high price of timber and it take much time to complete one design of wood carving. Meanwhile, Faizal (2012) mention that there are high demand of modern ornamentation as compared to traditional ornamentation by Malaysian customers.

In Malaysia, the art of wood requires protection and the Malaysian government should give greater emphasis on its production because it is being promoted as one of sources for Malaysia's economic growth. Many scholars also agreed that craft product can be one of medium for tourism development (Puvaneswaran K., Sarjit S.G., Ahmad Tarmizi Talib, 2015). Thus, the production of this craft requires constant protection of its authenticity as cultural heritage property. This could only be achieved through proper method of preservation especially on the aspects of design characteristics, properties and craftsmanship of the traditional art of wood carving.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Wood carving is the earliest enduring form and widespread medium for artistic expression produced by wood carvers. In Malaysia, wood carving had become parts and parcel of vernacular architecture such as traditional houses, mosque and palaces. Wood carving also has been applied in craft objects. However current situation shows that there are discontinuity of traditions in the making of Malay wood carving. These include invention of new motifs for contemporary application, competition from international wood carving products as cultural heritage especially on its tangible and intangible values and also improper documentation on cultural heritage product.

According to Zuraini, Noor Hanita, & Norazah (2015), two factors determined why this tradition of making wood carving had discontinued: 1) there are lack of young wood carver to generate this art, 2) there are difficulties in sustaining the production of wood carving due to the high cost of timber. While there are less demand of wood carving in contemporary buildings due to modernization (Silah et.al; 2013). Many users prefer architecture build in brick and motar that lead to less demanding of timber products. Also, invention of wood carving motifs for contemporary use has become issues why this art should be preserved (Faisal, 2012). Contemporary carvers state that contemporary motif can give fresh look to the art of wood carving and traditional Malay motif look similar to those from Thailand and Indonesia (Kosmo, 2016). Besides, local customers prefer to buy wood carving products from other countries such as Indonesia and Thailand (Norhaiza, 2014). Wood carving products from Indonesia and Thailand are usually cheaper in price although with complex and delicate design.

There are lack of documentation on the wood carving craft sectors. This had been proven that many countries face with difficulties in collecting accurate data (N. Richard, 2007). This situation should not continue because many objects of invaluable cultural heritage face deterioration due to lack of maintenance and preservation practice (Dharmarajan et.al, 2006). There are three issues that relate to the conservation of cultural heritage; 1)lack of information and visual graphics of cultural product, 2)most of invaluable cultural heritage are exposed to fast deterioration effect due to lack of maintenance and preservation practice, 3)most of cultural heritage, cultural products are located in different institutions and they are not properly documented. Many products are in private or individual hand and very little is known about their cultural heritage value and not properly documented by the owners on the

products information. Jabatan Warisan Negara has classified the wood carving under intangible and tangible heritage component. However, detail information about the classification is not available for reference.

Saberi.et,al (2013) suggest that the wood carving element should have been counted as one of the significant Malaysia's cultural heritage and the properties and characteristics of carving as cultural heritage should be well organized. In order to protect them, a proper conservation practice are needed to protect the heritage asset from lost due to natural causes or human negligence that may affect its cultural heritage values.

UNESCO Office, Jakarta, (2010) stated that cultural heritage plays an important role in developing the country's economic gain. The culture, arts and heritage, especially craft work has become one of sources of economic growth as it has been well promoted. Thus it is significant that the promotion of the craft for economic growth should be parallel with the identity of the craft as cultural property which required constant protection. Hence, this research aims to investigate on how the preservation of Malay wood carving as one of Malay cultural heritage is practiced in the region of North Eastern states of Peninsular Malaysia. The emphasis is given on the criteria of the heritage component including the characteristics of the wood carving as cultural heritage.

### **1.3 AIM OF RESEARCH**

The aim of this study is to recommend a guideline for the preservation method of traditional Malay wood carving of North eastern states of Malay Peninsular Malaysia in sustaining its cultural heritage value. This research highlight on the physical and properties of wood carvings that are preserved as cultural heritage product and object.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- i)What are the visual characteristics and physical properties of old traditional Malay wood carving in the North eastern States of Peninsular Malaysia which signify it as cultural heritage component?
- ii)How the wood carvers and other related parties preserve the components as cultural heritage ?
- iii)What are the traditional methods used to carve the wood carving ?
- iv) What are the guidelines for the preservation of wood carving as one of cultural heritage components in Malaysia?

## **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

- I. To examine the visual characteristics and physical properties of traditional Malay wood carving in the North eastern States of Peninsular Malaysia which signify it as cultural heritage component.
- II. To determine the preservation method of wood carving as cultural heritage by the selected wood carvers and other related parties.
- III. To recommend guidelines of preserving wood carving as one of cultural heritage component.

## **1.6 RESEARCH GAP**

Many scholars have conducted their researches on wood carving with different scopes of study. In 1987 to 2009, most researchers focused on general application and description of the wood carving in the Malay traditional architecture of Peninsular Malaysia. For examples, Zumahiran (2018) had conducted a study titled Composition of Malay Woodcarving; Case Study on Two Traditional Houses. Her research focused on the motif composition between two different case studies. In 2002, Ismail Said came out with research on visual composition of Malay woodcarvings in vernacular houses of Peninsular Malaysia. He has discovered that the major similarities in visual composition of motif is the four principles forms of carving patterns and seven shapes of carving arrangements and the different occurred in types of motifs and types of incisions.

In previous five years, most researchers focus on the ornamentation of carving motif in traditional building and also its application. Nursuriani Shaffee and Ismail Said (2013) researched on evolution of carving motifs in Malay Vernacular Architecture in Kelantan and Terengganu. Hafiza Ismail et al (2014) completed their research on the meaning of Malay motif wood carving in Terengganu mosques. While in 2014, Hamdzun Harun had a research on cut out carving with an emphasis on Innovation of Malay heritage in design pattern in the Malay pottery, known as Labu Sayong.

From the review of related studies, it show that there are lack of researches that focus on preservation method of traditional Malay wood carving in sustaining its cultural heritage values in terms of tangible or intangible values.

## **1.7 SCOPE OF RESEARCH**

This study is confined on visual characteristics and physical properties of selected wood carvings in the north eastern region of peninsular Malaysia including Terengganu and Kelantan. Field observation were conducted at National Museum, workshops and galleries of selected woodcarvers in the same region. The researcher selected different types of components for analysis including wall panels, utilitarian objects and ornamental carving. The analysis focused on their visual characteristic and physical properties of the wood carvings that signify it as cultural heritage component.

## **1.8 SIGNIFICANT OF RESEARCH**

This study is not intended to cover all the aspect of the wood carving areas. There is some different point of study that contributes to this field of knowledge which focuses on preservation of wood carving as cultural heritage. The findings of the study may be useful for the related organization and groups of people. The significances of this study are summarized in the following three points:

- 1 This study would fill in the gap of knowledge in the area of wood carving pertaining to the preservation of wood carving as cultural heritage. The research findings could serve as an additional resource to the existing knowledge in this field.
- 2 To propose guidelines will benefit the art authorities, practitioners and also people who are concerned with the conservation of art of wood carving in Malaysia. This will assists them in their efforts to the preservation of wood carving as cultural heritage.
- 3 The findings of this research also discover the visual characteristics and physical properties of wood carving that reflect its authenticity. These findings become references for future generation and they will continue doing the related researches in the same area for further development of wood carving and other related arts and crafts.

## **1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS**

The thesis is organized in five chapters as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Chapter one is an introductory chapter consisting of the research background, research aim, research questions and research objectives. This chapter is an overview of research starting from the research subject, scope of research, significances of study and lastly the structure of thesis. The next chapter is Chapter 2 which covers on the reviews of previous studies and literatures which are related to the research topic. This chapter aims to give a well explanation on the meaning for each terms related to the research and discusses about the previous related researches, and the conceptual and theoretical parts of this study. This chapter also provides the background to understanding of the theoretical frameworks of this research. Chapter 3 involves the research methodology used in the study. This includes the principal methods of data collection used in the research. Every method used is explained in detail within the specified section. Methods for data analysis also were highlighted in this chapter. Next is chapter 4 that consists of the discussion on results and findings after data analyses. This chapter presents analytical review of data obtained from the field observation and interviews with the selected wood carvers and authorities at Jabatan Warisan Negara. The interviews were used as verification. This chapter consists a thorough discussion on results and research findings according to the objectives of study as highlighted in page 5. Chapter 5 is a concluding chapter that covers the summary of key research findings with proposed recommendation based on the research findings. This chapter also provides a few suggestion for further researches and development of the wood carving craft.