

PHYSICAL ANALYSIS OF *KELINGKAN* SHAWLS AS
SUSTAINABLE ARTEFACTS FOR MUSEUMS IN
MALAYSIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Kelingkan embroidery is one of traditional hand-made Malay historical textiles which is currently facing a state of declination in Peninsular Malaysia due to diminishing number of surviving skilful artisans. Initial survey conducted on the collection of *kelingkan* embroideries in several local museums in Peninsular Malaysia revealed certain degrees of degradations and lack of systematic management on their inventory, storage and conservation methods. The main aim of this study is to safeguard and maintain the well-being and sustainability of *kelingkan* embroideries as national heritage. Hence, the study embarks on a series of identification, classification and documentation of *kelingkan* shawls as a form of *kelingkan* embroideries in terms of their physical characteristics and conditions. The case study is limited to 25 samples of Malay *kelingkan* shawls embroidered by satin stitch technique and stored in the textile storage room of the Department of Museums Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Multiple methods of data collection conducted include visual observation, microscopic analyses and burning tests supported by literatures, interviews and participatory observation. The findings reveal similarities and differences on physical characteristics of *kelingkan* shawls which can be grouped into materials, colours, shapes, patterns and motifs. The condition of *kelingkan* shawls are consequently classified into good-fair, fair, poor and very poor condition with different degrees of physical, chemical and biological damages. The output of the research is the documentation of *kelingkan* shawls in the form of inventory detailing their physical characteristics, conditions, and damages. This inventory will serve as databank, beneficial for curators and conservators in curative and preventive conservation of *kelingkan* shawls. In conclusion, further researches in the curative and preventive conservation of the embroidery are recommended as to ensure its continuous wellbeing and to contribute to the currently limited literatures in the preservation of *kelingkan* embroidery.

خلاصة البحث

تطريز كلنجكان هي واحدة من المنسوجات التقليدية الملايوية التاريخية المصنوعة يدويا والتي تواجه حاليا حالة من الانخفاض في شبه جزيرة ماليزيا بسبب تناقص عدد الحرفيين المهرة على قيد الحياة. وكشفت الدراسة الاستقصائية الأولية التي أجريت على مجموعة من مطرزات كلنجكان في العديد من المتاحف المحلية في شبه جزيرة ماليزيا بعض درجات التدهور وعدم وجود إدارة منهجية على المخزون والتخزين وطرق الحفظ. والهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو الحفاظ على رفاه واستدامة مطرزات كلنجكان كتراث وطني. ومن ثم، تشرع الدراسة في سلسلة من تحديد وتصنيف وتوثيق شالات كلنجكان كشكل من أشكال مطرزات كلنجكان من حيث خصائصها وظروفها المادية. وتقتصر دراسة الحالة على 25 عينة من شالات كلنجكان الملايوية المطرزة بتقنية غرزة الساتان والمخزنة في غرفة تخزين المنسوجات التابعة لإدارة المتاحف الماليزية في كوالالمبور. وتشمل الطرق المتعددة لجمع البيانات التي تتم الملاحظة البصرية، والتحليلات المجهرية، واختبارات الحرق التي تدعمها المؤلفات والمقابلات والمراقبة التشاركية. وتكشف النتائج عن أوجه تشابه واختلاف في الخصائص الفيزيائية لشالات كلنجكان والتي يمكن تجميعها في مواد وألوان وأشكال وأنماط وزخارف. وبالتالي تصنف حالة شالات كلنجكان إلى حالة جيدة ومنصفة وفقيرة وفقيرة جداً مع درجات مختلفة من الأضرار الفيزيائية والكيميائية والبيولوجية. وكان ناتج البحث هو توثيق شالات كلنجكان في شكل تجريد تفاصيل خصائصها المادية، وظروفها، والأضرار. كما سيكون هذا التجريد بمثابة بنك بيانات، مفيد للقيمين والمحافظين في الحفظ العلاجي والوقائي لشالات كلنجكان. في الختام، وأوصى مزيد من البحوث في الحفظ العلاجي والوقائي من التطريز لضمان رفاهيتها المستمرة والمساهمة في الأدبيات المحدودة حاليا للحفاظ على تطريز كلنجكان.

APPROVAL PAGE

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

Au	Gold
Ag	Silver
C	Carbon
Cu	Cuprum
In	Indium
Lux	Unit of illuminance
O	Oxygen
S	Sulphur
%	Percentage of relative humidity
°C	Degree Celsius
&	and
Wt.%	Weight percent

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	American Institute for Conservation
CM	Centimetre
DMM	The Department of Museums Malaysia
ID	Identification number of samples
KT	<i>Kelingkan</i> thread
M	Meter
NAA	Neutron Activation Analysis
n.d	no date
PADAT	Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Negeri Selangor
RH	Relative Humidity

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Kelingkan embroidery is one of Malay historical textiles that include *limar*, *telepuk*, *tekat* and *songket* in Malaysia (Rose Dahlina Rusli & Norwani Md.Nawawi, 2016). *Kelingkan* embroidery is distinguished by the use of flat and thin metallic threads of traditionally gilded gold or silver which threaded onto variant of fabrics of cotton and silks by a customized 2 holes needle, resulted with glittering motifs often found on Malay textiles include shawls, traditional costumes and wedding bedroom furnishings.

This traditional hand-made metallic thread embroidery is enriched with historical, cultural and aesthetical values. *Kelingkan* embroidery holds historical tangible evidences of shared Malay arts in Nusantara as exhibited in its delicate workmanship and distinctive materials. These values are also embodied in the regal costumes of Malay nobilities.

Unfortunately, in Peninsular Malaysia *kelingkan* embroidery is in the state of declination. Its practice remains strong in Sarawak but the embroidery is fearfully diminishing in the West Malaysia (Rose Dahlina and Norwani, 2016). There are only few surviving Malay women practitioners, mostly in advanced age in the remaining states of Selangor and Kelantan. Rose Dahlina and Norwani (2016) state that the preservation of *kelingkan* embroidery is of importance particularly on the dying knowledge of the tools, technique and motifs of this art of embroidery.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In Malaysia, *kelingkan* embroidery is well known in Peninsular Malaysia as well as in Sarawak. It is also popular in Brunei, Singapore and several states in Indonesia. The geographical and language differences explain the existing various *kelingkan* terms like *keringkam* in Sarawak, *terekam* in Terengganu and *kelengkan* in Kelantan (Suhana Sarkawi, 2016).

Kelingkan embroidery in Peninsular Malaysia is believed to have originated during the reign of Malacca Sultanate, when it was a powerful centre of international trade, Islamic religion and Malay culture in 15th century. Luxurious foreign textiles including decorated fabrics embellished with gold threads were brought to the local market in Malacca and were highly favoured by the Malay nobilities. Azah Aziz (2009) stated that the arrival of these sumptuous fabrics has led to the development of Malay metal thread embroideries in Peninsular Malaysia as fabrics began to be embellished by local artisans with gold and silver threads.

In the past, the development of Malay metal threads embroidery in Peninsular Malaysia was under the patronage of the Malay royals and nobilities, as gold and sumptuous textiles were solely privileged to and highly afforded by them. In the beginning, the art of *kelingkan* embroidery was mastered by the Malay noble women as their favourite pastime. This embroidery then was taught to the servants living within the palace compounds. Gradually, it was disseminated to the public, learnt by the common people and became popular in 19th century.

Kelingkan embroidery is the art of Muslim Malay community in Malaysia and this is illustrated through the reflection of Islamic philosophies in its motifs. The absence of complete images of figures and animals are replaced by the various motifs

appreciating God natures include flowers, plants, mountains, stars, waves as well as the Arabic inscriptions and few forms of modified animal motifs.

Kelingkan shawl, which is intended as the focus of the study, is commonly made from sheer and lightweight fabrics such as cotton gauze and voiles, as well as variant types of silks such as crepe, chiffon, sateen, organza and net. *Kelingkan* shawl is worn over the head or shoulders of a woman as part of traditional Malay costumes, during occasions like engagements, weddings and royal coronaries. It is commonly worn by the Malay women in Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and other related Malay regions.

There are 3 major techniques of *kelingkan* embroidery in Malaysia. A technique which is widely practiced in Sarawak is known as *keringkam* while in Selangor *teknik riben* or the ribbon technique is commonly known. The third technique which is the focus of this study is called *teknik tikam tembus* or the satin stitch technique (Rose Dahlina and Norwani, 2016) or also known as *teknik tikam-tarik-ulang-selit* (Suhana, 2016). This technique can be found in many states of Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and other Malay regions.

Furthermore, the assimilation of external cultures in the *kelingkan* embroidery is exhibited by the similarity of traits with other foreign embroideries such as *tel musabak*, *tel kirma* and *tel sarma* in Turkey, *mukaish badla* in India and *tally* in Egypt (Suhana, 2016 & Adline Abdul Ghani and Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria, 2013).

Today, *kelingkan* embroidery is considered as a national heritage asset, collected and exhibited by many museums in Malaysia. Prior to embarking on this research, a preliminary study on *kelingkan* embroideries was conducted by the researcher in the Department of Museums of Malaysia, located in Kuala Lumpur. The preliminary study demonstrates that the museum acquisition of *kelingkan* embroideries began as early as 1960s, and the earliest *kelingkan* embroideries found are not more than 150 years of

age. The preliminary study also reveals that a large collection of *kelingkan* embroideries in the textile storage room are suffering from various levels of degradations, insufficient data documentation in inventories as well as inappropriate storage methods.

In the light of the above statement, this research is conducted to safeguard and maintain the well-being and sustainability of *kelingkan* embroidery as a national heritage. By this, the study embarks on a series of physical analyses and documentation on the physical characteristics and conditions of *kelingkan* shawls from the collection of the Department of Museums Malaysia located in Kuala Lumpur.

The research intends, at the final phase of the study, to produce a detailed inventory of *kelingkan* shawls detailing their physical characteristics include materials, colours, shapes, patterns and motifs. The inventory will also record categories of the artefacts conditions include their categories of damages, condition rating codes and recommendation of appropriate storage methods.

Kelingkan embroidery is a form of Malay embroidery and hence, Malay terminologies which provide better and concise description of their types and embroidery processes are extensively used in this research. The operational definitions of the Malay terminologies are provided in the section 1.11 for the readers to have a clear understanding of the research.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are limitations of literatures on the *kelingkan* shawls compared to other Malay golden thread textiles like *songket* and *batik* especially on the topics of their preservations. The rarity of written works on *kelingkan* embroidery serves as an indication that this art is not known to the present generation. In addition, the preliminary study conducted in the Department of Museums Malaysia also reveals the

multiple levels of degradations, inventory insufficiency and inadequate storage methods of *kelingkan* shawls in the museum textile storage room. The scarcity of skilful artisans in the art of embroidery with the surviving few being in advanced age, further exacerbate this problem, leading to the diminishing state of this traditional Malay embroidery. Hence, actions are needed to preserve this national heritage and sustain its longevity for the appreciation of current and future generations.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to safeguard the well-being and maintain the sustainability of *kelingkan* shawls as national heritage. This is realised through a series of identification, classification and documentation of physical characteristics of *kelingkan* shawls, as well as the assessment of their types of conditions in the textile storage room of the Department of Museums Malaysia located in Kuala Lumpur.

1.5 RESEARCHES OBJECTIVES

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To identify, classify and document the physical characteristics as well as conditions of *kelingkan* shawls through physical and visual observation.
- ii. To assess the level of degradations on *kelingkan* shawls through physical analyses.
- iii. To produce a detailed inventory that documents the physical characteristics of the *kelingkan* shawls in the collection of the Department of Museums Malaysia for the benefit of curators, conservators and future researchers.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research aims to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the attributes of *kelingkan* shawls that need to be identified in order to classify them according to their physical characteristics?
- ii. What are the types of degradations suffered by *kelingkan* shawls in museum storage room?
- iii. What data that needs to be collected in order to come out with detailed inventory of *kelingkan* shawls that could help in the preservation of these artefacts?

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The research adopts a case study approach involving multiple methods of data collections which are presented below:

1.7.1 Preliminary Study

A preliminary study is conducted in museum textiles storage rooms in Peninsular Malaysia to seek an introductory overview on the physical characteristics of *kelingkan* shawls and their conditions in the storage room.

1.7.2 Literature Review

Literature reviews include books, journals, proceedings, museum inventories, websites and newspapers.