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Exclusivity vs Functionality: A Case Study of Labu Sayong

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Abstract

Sayong is normally used a water vessel which is believed to have medicinal effects. Tourist are now the majority buyer of Labu Sayong as this product served as souvenirs for them to bring back home. As technology moved forward for better, Labu Sayong are now made using modern techniques in order to cater to market's demand. Traditional Labu Sayong makers are now on the verge of extinction as fewer potters are now adopting the modern method. This research was conducted to examine the potentials use of contemporary methods in manufacturing Labu Sayong in replacing the traditional method while at the same time sustaining its exclusivity and functionality. Data for this paper were collected using qualitative methods that included interview and observation. This research found that there were differences between the traditional and modern production of labu sayong which are divided into exclusivity, technology and economical values. The exclusivity in Labu Sayong is the clay that is made from, which only available in Kepala Bendang, Sayong. Based on the interviews conducted, this study found that both traditional and modern Labu Sayong have the same benefits when it comes to functionality. Based on the economy factor, the traditional Labu Sayong is not relevant today as it takes more time and labour compared to modern Labu Sayong whilst being much more expensive. The perception of Labu Sayong among local residents and tourists have changed over time and they are no longer concern much about its exclusivity and functionality. Consequently, this not only can help to minimize the operational cost but also ease production as well as maintaining the originality of Labu Sayong.

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Key-word: - Labu Sayong, Exclusivity, Functionality, Modern, Traditional

1. Introduction

Art and crafts in Malaysia play a huge role in socio-culture and should be recognized as a regional, local and national importance that has a heritage significance. Labu Sayong is categorized as one of the most significant culture heritage in Malaysia. It is not only admired for its functionality, but also for its beauty and unique form (Noordin, 2012). With the implementation of modern manufacturing process in the handicrafts sector, there has been an increase in craft sales, especially among foreign markets (Redzuan & Aref, 2011). Labu Sayong makers can not only make their products faster, but also at cheaper cost, hence creating a distinctiveness in the manufacturing process. However, given a certain amount of time, the traditional way of making the Labu Sayong will slowly be forgotten.

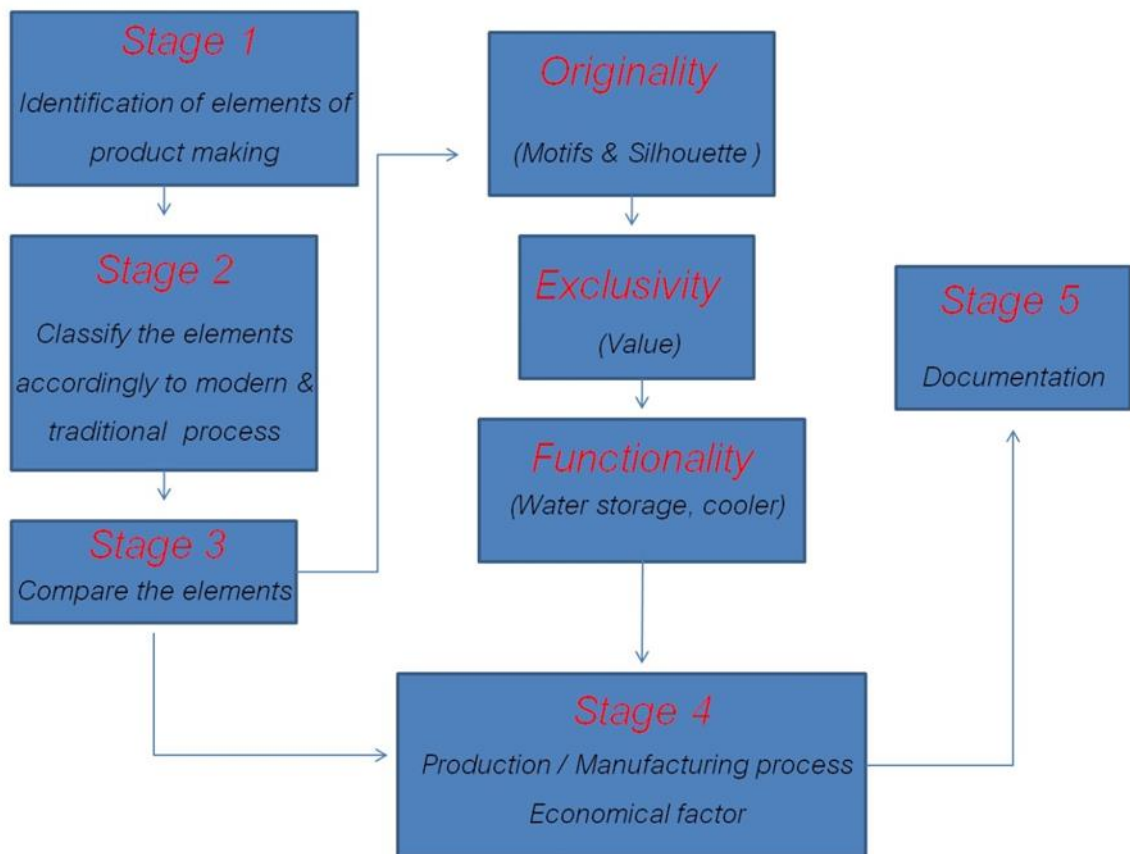
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Therefore, it is crucial to make a comparative study between the traditional and the modern way of making Labu Sayong in order to identify the advantages of preserving the traditional method which comes with exclusivity and functionality but at the same time fulfil the current needs and demands of Malaysian society.

Today, it can be seen that craftsmen in Malaysia are up against a challenge where they need to continue encouraging and maintaining their interest in the art and crafts production whilst maintaining its authenticity and exclusivity among local residents and tourists. Succeeding in this challenge would ensure a sustainable development of the traditional arts and crafts industry (Kamarudin, 2013). Even though handmade crafts are sought after, industrial-based production is the norm in the modern world for its fast and cheap production. This shows each method both have relative importance that differs from one another in terms of production and contribution to this country's economy (Kamarudin, 2013).

2. Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative method. A design research framework was made as a guideline to ensure the research on the right track. Researcher used the interview instrument to get the elicited information from the participant. Commentaries from the participant are the main characteristic of qualitative methodologies as it is to identify in-depth understanding of the scenario from the participant point of view which minimize disruption to the natural context of the scenario (Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). It is also agreed by Turner (2010), that the experiences and in-depth information of certain topic can be gained from conducting the interview.



Picture 1. Research Design

3. Background of Study

As a country that comprises multiple races with different ethnic backgrounds, cultural heritage plays an important role in developing this country. Cultural heritage can be divided into two categories: tangible and intangible, in other words, cultural heritage can be seen in many forms such as buildings, areas, dance, food, dress, values, lifestyle and handicrafts. Of all that were listed, handicrafts play an important part for the economy of this country (Redzuan & Aref, 2011).

Craftsmen in Malaysia have a sense of drive for the preservation of traditional crafts and craftsmanship namely in the art of pottery (Kamarudin, 2013). Since the pre-historic period, pottery is one of the common products that was produced in Malaysia, whereby, one of the most popular water vessels produced is the Labu Sayong. It is used to fulfil daily needs such as a place to store drinking water (Noordin, 2013). Labu Sayong is not only admired for its functionality, but also for its beauty and unique form (Noordin, 2012). The industry of Labu Sayong, which is concentrated on the banks of the Perak River, gets its material in the same vicinity, for example clay from the nearby river bed.

In Sayong, production of the Labu Sayong is done in the premises of artisans or producers. According to Kamarudin (2013), two artisans that practice the making of Labu Sayong in Sayong, show significant changes and variation of methods of production: both of them choose to stray from a monotonous method of production thus making them as exclusive artisans. At the same time, some artisans, even though prefer using modern method to ensure fast production for economic gain, still admires the beauty of Labu Sayong that are made using traditional techniques.

On the path of being a developed country, the Malaysian government has introduced programs to assist artisans to overcome the constraints that they faced (Redzuan & Aref, 2011). However, by changing the method of making such handicraft, the original method of making it may be lost overtime. Many traditional making processes of our cultural heritage, including the Labu Sayong, are in a very dangerous position of being forgotten. Being a developed country that forgets its roots is an oxymoron. Hence, a country's cultural heritage must be preserved for the enrichment and education for the present and future generation (Norhashimah et al, 2014).

4. Findings and Discussion

Findings from all the data collected can be categorized into three (3) main category: economic factors, exclusivity and functionality. all of these 3 main categories show definitive conclusion to how Labu Sayong are view in today's market trend. The use of technological manufacturing method as an innovative solution to produce Labu Sayong in large scales has already taken root in Kuala Kangsar. Both the mould and throwing technique are the most common technique practiced as those methods would increase production, reduce defects, cuts time and labour thus helping the makers to sustain against the market.

Labu Sayong, as it name suggests, can only be made in using clay that can be found in Kampung Pendang, Sayong. It is because of the unique characteristics of the clay from Kampung Pendang that Labu Sayong can keep its reputation as a must have water vessel among locals and tourist alike. Motifs applied to the outer part of the Labu Sayong varies, but the most common motifs are ragam hias, bunga cengkih, bunga pecah enam, geluk buyung and pucuk rebung. All of the motifs mentioned are applied by using tools 'pengukir kayu' and 'pengguris dawai'.

Within the use of modern machinery, the Labu Sayong industry can sustain as it is more economical compared to the traditional way. Even by using modern techniques, Labu Sayong can still be considered as an exclusive item due to the clay that it is made of which is only available in Kampung Pendang, Sayong. Relevancy through technology can be used as an alternative way to sustain the Labu Sayong Industry. Labu Sayong, as a water vessel with medicinal properties is no longer relevant in the world we live today. The reason for this is that it has been replaced by the common kitchen fridge and modern medicine. Due to the fact that Labu Sayong is only available in Kampung Sayong, people from other states would rather use a much more conventional approach where drinking water is concern.



Picture 2. Stage 1: Clay Process



Picture 3. Stage 2: Masterpiece and Mould Making



Picture 4. Stage 3: Slip Casting



Picture 5. Stage 4: Decorating



Picture 6. Stage 5: Firing

5. Summary

Labu Sayong once known as a significant household item. It is used for storage the drinking water and believed to have medicinal effects. Tourist are now the majority buyer of Labu Sayong as they are treated as souvenirs. Traditional Labu Sayong makers are now on the verge of extinction as fewer potters are now adopting the modern method. Data for this paper were collected using three methods: Interview, observation and descriptive study.

Both data for the traditional and modern Labu Sayong were collected as to make a distinctive comparison. It is found that there was significance in one of the three criteria the researcher looks into: exclusivity, technology and economical value. The exclusivity in Labu Sayong is the clay itself, which only come from Kepala Bendang. Now and then, Labu Sayong has the same benefits when it comes to functionality. However, in economy wise traditional Labu Sayong is not relevant today as it takes more time and labour compared to modern Labu Sayong whilst being much more expensive.

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