

The Applicability of *Awan Larat* Motif on Modern Typeface Representing The Malay Identity

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ABSTRACT

The selection of typeface is more than merely picking aesthetically pleasing typefaces; it is a crucial aspect of any digital design. In Graphic Design to have aesthetic appeal, it must have a clear visual hierarchy, a well-balanced design, and an overall tone that is consistent throughout. Other media such as wood carving patterns, murals, and graffiti art may also incorporate such typefaces. The design idea shall govern the precise patterns and motifs that could be applied to the typeface to make it more visually pleasant to the eye. One of the popular traditional ornaments in wood carving worn in Malaysia, known as *Awan Larat*. However, this traditional ornament, becoming increasingly irrelevant in the contemporary world. This is occurring due to technological improvements and a general lack of interest and appreciation on the side of the new generation of Malay population. The aim of this research is to determine that the *Awan Larat* motif can be adopted on a modern font representing the Malay identity on typefaces. As a result, the researcher was able to demonstrate how well the element of the Malay identity could blend with a modern font. This font can be used for a variety of purposes, including book and magazine covers, advertising, logos, and signage, among others. By using appealing fonts as a source of inspiration for native Malay components, it is possible to indirectly contribute to the development of Malay identity both inside and outside of Malaysia. It is hoped that this research will provide a better understanding of the significance of using this traditional motif in a modern typeface to raise awareness of the Malay people's cultural heritage values.

Keywords: *Awan Larat, Motif, Typeface, Malay Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has several unique cultures and customs, making it a genuinely multi-racial cosmopolitan nation. While industrialization of the globe and the internet are causing disinterest and the extinction of several traditional arts, we are still fortunate to have Malay painters who are renowned for their ability to integrate the forms and patterns of indigenous flora into their carvings. This one element influences every aspect of Malay culture. There are several forms of symbols that may serve as the topic of an artistic work. Motifs can be symbols, sounds, motions, thoughts, or phrases. These are used to construct a

narrative via concepts and philosophy to reinforce the production or activities. The origin of the English word motif is the French phrase motif, which means "pattern" (Purnomo, 2017). The arrangement of flowers in Malay signifies the need for immaculate competence and knowledge or a composed, ordered characteristic, such as social integration, self-discipline, a soothing voice, and an attractive look, among others. Prior to modernization, Malay culture has utilised such themes in its art for centuries. Numerous research and discussions have been conducted to determine the origins, effects, and potential solutions for teaching Malaysians about the importance and relevance of motifs in expressing the Malay identity. This research is an excellent method to increase awareness of the significance and beauty of these themes design. Similarly, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not the *Awan Larat* pattern may be incorporated into contemporary fonts to represent Malay identity (Faisal, et al., 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malay Traditional Wood Carving

On everything from household items to boats and utensils, floral motifs predominated in Malay woodcarving. The artisans chose to implement their ideas after being inspired by the profusion of plant species in the home complex and nearby forest. For this element, most people turn to vine-like plants like *ketubit*, *guri*, *bunga cina*, and others like star anise and hibiscus. Plants have inspired Malays carvers for centuries (Faisal, et al., 2018). They are constantly soaking in the beauty of their surroundings and transforming it into something others may appreciate (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Motif Flora
(Source: Syed Ahmad Jamal, 1979, p. 20)

Malay woodcarving is prohibited by Islamic doctrine from representing live beings. Animal motifs were prevalent in Malaya before to the introduction of Islam. Malays have blended Hinduism and Buddhism into their sculptures in a region where both religions are popular. Depending on the species, animal themes have been either neglected or rendered in an abstract and vaguely stylized manner throughout the region since the introduction of Islam. There are just a few sculptors who continue to use

animals in their work, such as the chicken, a row of quacking ducks, or the head of an alligator. Malays were persuaded to follow their leader's directives by animal behaviours, such as 'itik pulang petang' Frequently, animal motions serve as inspiration for wood sculptures (Kari, et al., 2018) (Figure 2).

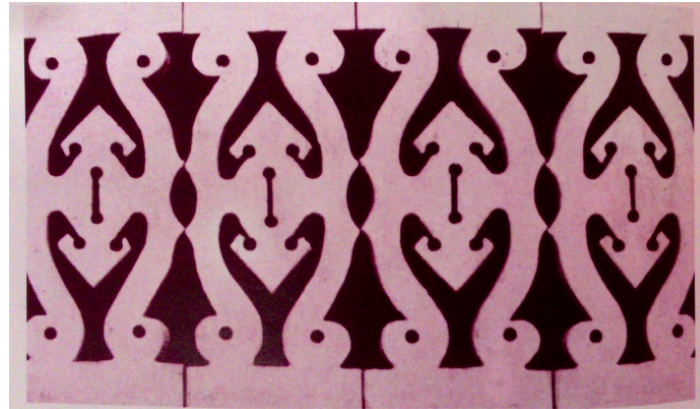


Figure 2. Motif Fauna
(Source: Abdul Halim Nasir, 1987, p. 102)

After the arrival of Islam to the Malay Archipelago, local artisans carved Jawi calligraphy and Qur'anic verses. Malay artisans who employ a variety of Arabic scripts convert Quranic verses onto wooden panels. As seen by this etching, Islam and the Quran as a compilation of God's words were treasured. With this design, relief carving, perforated carving, or a mix of the two are all feasible (Kari, et al., 2018). Calligraphy is frequently used to convey a message to the public on Islamic structures, such as mosques and private residences (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Motif Calligraphy
(Source: Syed Ahmad Jamal, 1979, p 126)

These geometric patterns have gained in prominence in tandem with the Islamization of the Malay people. The mosque, tombs, castles, and mansions are the most frequent locations where this style of geometric design is seen. Using their love of geometry, Malayan Islamic painters developed a unique and distinctive Islamic art style. Combining geometric themes with other elements, such as floral or calligraphy, is commonplace (Kari, et al., 2018). In addition to circles, triangles, squares, and paragons are among the most frequent geometric figures (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Motif Geometric
(Source: Farish Noor and Eddin Khoo, 2003, p. 45)

***Awan Larat* Wood Carving Pattern**

In the fourteenth century, the aesthetic craft development of Malay culture became more influenced by the concept of Tawhid, which is the realisation of God's oneness (Esa, 2019). *Awan Larat*, was taken for use as a symbol to represent the significance of the relationship between humans, the cosmos, and Allah (God). This form of independence is in no way attached, connected, or expressed. *Pola Putu* or also known as *Pola Bujang* is an alternative term for it. Flowers, fruit, and flower buds are recurring themes in this motif with a single design and no repetitions (Aida Kesuma Azmin et al., 2021) (Figure 5). Due to its delicate nature, *Awan Larat* is composed of joined sections that produce a single complete carving. These pieces are suitable for a range of compositions and tend to place a larger emphasis on plant features. In other words, *Awan Larat* is a visual form based on the repetition of a motif in a particular arrangement and composition, with no interruptions in the linkages between the motif's repetitions. This notion entails the interaction of pieces, such as leaves, tendrils, flower buds, flowers, and shoots, within a full composition.



Figure 5: *Pola Bujang*
(Source: Warisan Ukiran Kayu)

Single and screen patterns can be merged to form a single, comprehensive pattern. Self-destructive rivalry This pattern is also known as the "Main Pattern" or "*Pola Induk / Pola Lengkap*." This sort of pattern is particularly prevalent on plant elements owing to its softness and the fact that it has a beginning and an end (Nazuki et al., 2017) (Figure 6). Typically, this carving is paired with a complete design. This complete pattern wood carving provides a soft vibe which resembles the *Awan Larat* motif aesthetically. Floral themes and symmetrical groups dominated the carvings, allowing the Malay people to practise wood carving using *Awan Larat* patterns. Including the application of *Awan Larat's* Malay aesthetic concepts and features to the traditional Malay woodcarving theme of Terengganu.



Figure 6. Pola Lengkap
(Source: *Warisan Ukiran Kayu*)

Typeface Design as Cultural Identity

In today's more visual environment, typeface design is frequently utilised by modern advertisers as a technique of developing a brand signature. Typefaces are capable of evoking associations and memories. According to the majority of type practitioners and communication designers, the utilisation of typefaces' connotative qualities is crucial for efficient visual communication. It is possible for typefaces to transfer personality traits such as elegance, friendliness, and forthrightness. As a result, brand names (logos) can also communicate meaning through the typeface they employ. Numerous industry experts believe that a person's choice of typeface might influence how they interpret visual data. It should not come as a surprise that advertisers lay a significant focus on visual rhetoric, especially the use of typefaces. If the design elements of the typeface match those of the advertised goods, one might predict more positive responses (message). In the past two decades, academics in the field of consumer research have found the role of typography in advertising and the consumer environment to be among the most intriguing. If an advertiser is interested in the significance of fonts and their congruence with the product or item in question, their findings are highly beneficial for strategically disseminated impressions. In a typeface, the aesthetic characteristics of the characters, such as line thickness, corner smoothness, width, height, etc., are deemed to be of the utmost importance. These characteristics distinguish one typeface from another, just as our faces differ from one another. Given that all of these factors influence how we see a form and how that impression evolves, the choice of typeface is a rhetorical choice. Consistency between the typography and the advertisement's content emphasised the advertisement's significance. The choice of typeface played an influence in the final brand decision.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory research design (Figure 7), which collects primary data mostly qualitatively. This study is exploratory because it focuses on a topic which has a high degree of uncertainty and ignorance, or because the subject is poorly understood. Typically, this study examines *Awan Larat* motifs, a topic that is unfamiliar and poorly understood by the general public (Sabri, et al. 2021). The primary objective of this research is to identify the motif of *Awan Larat* in various woodcarving patterns. Secondly, the researcher shall investigate the importance and aesthetic value of the *Awan Larat* motif in a particular wood carving design. After achieving these objectives, the researcher will conduct secondary data analysis by reviewing scholarly articles, books, and other internet resources. Subsequent to the primary data gathering which consist of qualitative information - an observational approach to the selected wood carving patterns shall be undertaken. Finally, the researcher shall analyse

the relevance of integrating the *Awan Larat* motif on modern typefaces such as Bold Arial (which researchers have already utilised in the sample) as the last objective for adoption (Padun & Das, 2021).

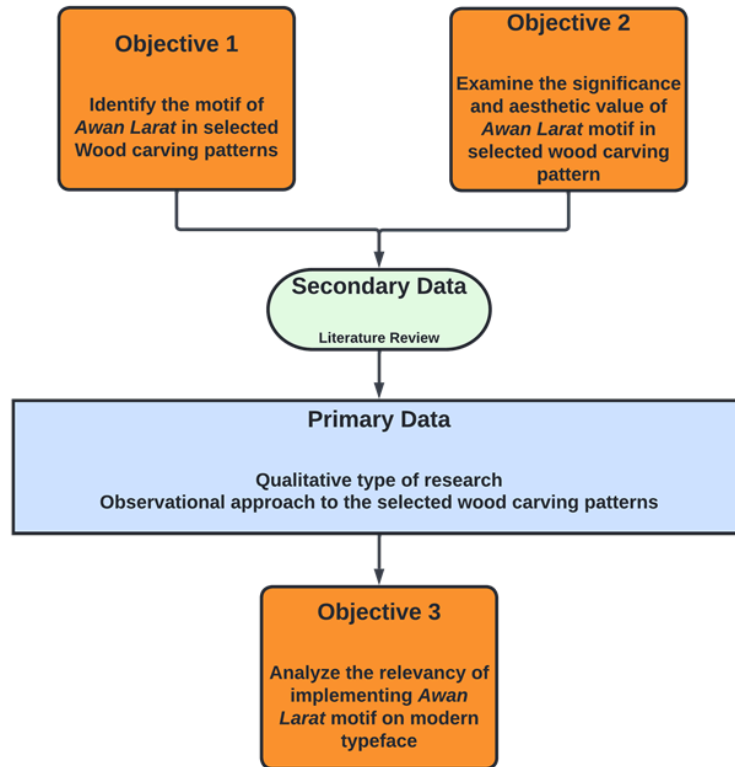


Figure 7. Research Framework

DISCUSSION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Even though there are many prospective motifs, only those that are in good shape and have historical relevance will be examined. Due to the uniformity of their pattern of manufacture and placement in the wood, wood carvings as carved ornaments have a specific regional character. To collect data for this study, researchers have selected one (1) theme – *Awan Larat* motif to be implemented and create a new typeface design.

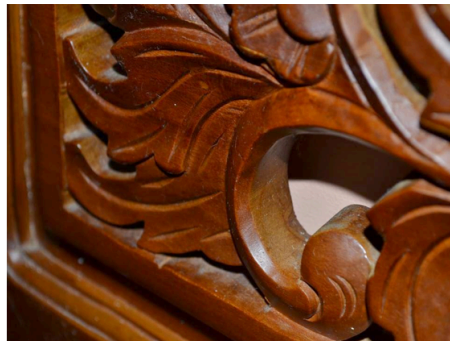


Figure 8. Tebuk Silat Wood Carving - using *Awan Larat* motif
(Source: Author's collection)

In the observation of the *Awan Larat* motif, the researchers have chosen a specific part on the *Awan Larat* motif based on its behavioural and structural form. After picking the significant part of the motif from the wood carving pattern, the researcher has simplified the motif using a pencil sketch (Figure 9A) in order to generate a prototype for the subsequent digitization process. After the sketching phase, the researcher digitalized and implemented the *Awan Larat* motif into a modern typeface. In this example, the researcher has chosen the typeface "Arial Bold" (Figure 9B). For this digitization process, the researcher utilised Adobe Illustrator as the appropriate software to demonstrate that the *Awan Larat* motif may be incorporated into the typeface to symbolise the Malay identity.

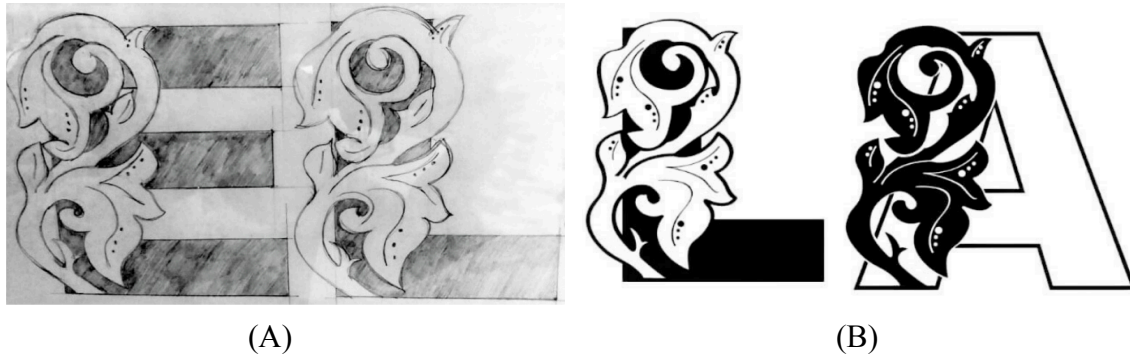


Figure 9. (A) After stylize the motif implementation on sketches; (B) After sketches, implementation on digital

CONCLUSION

This wonderful woodcarving, which is emblematic of Malay culture, is not only used for aesthetics, but also in architecture as well in graphic design. There are many wood carving patterns that can be found in Malaysia. These patterns can be simplified and applied on modern fonts which have thicker stems. Thus, the pattern looks more sturdy and harmonious as the font weight carries the motif which is embedded on the font. The combination of motifs on modern fonts may also assist the Malay companies in expressing their authentic local identity on a global scale such as logo, packaging design, promotional items etc. Although there are still some restrictions in implementing the motif into certain modern fonts, these are easily surmountable by exploring the suitable modern fonts which give the harmony and balance look of the selected part of the motif. In order to preserve the cultural significance, the *Awan Larat* motifs or other wood carving patterns which resemble the Malay identity, it is crucial to resist their use in modern designs to gain popularity especially among the young generations.

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