

Preserving Malay Heritage: Basic Understanding of the Traditional Boats Making in Terengganu

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ABSTRACT

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Traditional ways of making boats are slowly fading because many things have changed since the modern age began. As technology improves worldwide, this study attempts to discover how traditional boats are made in Terengganu. It also suggests a way to keep future generations aware of how traditional boats are made. This study employed a depth interview with a shipwright and field observations at the Terengganu State Museum as part of a qualitative research method. They discussed the fundamental procedure used to make all different types of traditional boats from Terengganu. The findings of this study established a possible medium for preserving Malay Heritage.



1. INTRODUCTION

Many aspects of culture, including customs, beliefs, and ways of life, are passed down from generation to generation. Despite this, many cultural components have been lost due to advances in technology and education, even if modernity is a transition that improves the quality of life in the context of human civilisation. In this sense, most aspects of Malaysian culture and heritage result from a long historical process. As such, they are dynamic and flexible enough to undergo and experience a change process.

The arts of carving, weaving, and metal works play an important role in Malaysia's cultural and historical traditions. For example, Malaysia has many ways to make traditional cultural artefacts. The production of these components was essential in the development of Malay civilisation within the state. Therefore, issues such as the majority of younger generations' lack of interest, the decreasing demands for traditional boats or wooden boats, and the reduction in the number of sailing activities in our contemporary day have pushed these arts to extinction. The preservation of our boat heritage involves allowing it to become material relevant to the study of history. Despite this, efforts need to be made to document all of the knowledge so that it can be used as a reference and source of inspiration for the heirs responsible for re-establishing the new Malay maritime civilisation.

There are two major objectives for this research. The first objective is to obtain a fundamental understanding of the process of producing traditional boats in Terengganu, and the second objective is to propose a possible medium for the long-term preservation of Terengganu's traditional boats for future generations. These objectives also accomplish the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is to ensure that future generations have access to quality education in which they may learn about their history as well as the glories of their country.

2. THE TRADITIONAL BOAT MAKING IN TERENGGANU

2.1 A Brief History

Before the 19th century, the Malay economic system depended heavily on agriculture and food crops. However, the economic participation of the Malay population in many Malaysian states, particularly Kedah, Perak, and Terengganu, is considerably distinct (Amarjit Kaur, 1985).

The Malays in Terengganu live in a society surrounded by the world sea and have a solid connection to boat culture. The most obvious link between Malay culture in Terengganu and boat culture is that the tools used in Malay culture have much to do with the sea and boats. People think of the boat as a tool and a sign of the maritime community's proximity to the sea. The deep boat society is so vital that the boat's influence is part of the community. So, the importance of boats to the maritime community can be shown by using symbols from architecture and carving, such as handicrafts, house construction, and weapons.

Aside from helping fishermen make a living, boats also became a way for the ruling class to show their importance. In the past, the boat was one of the official vehicles for the royal group at certain events. (Hablinur et al., 2012).

2.2 Types of Terengganu Traditional Boat

According to Norazilawati Abd Wahab & Arba'iyah Mohd Noor (2013), during the 19th century, carpentry and handicraft activities began to be exploited to meet the needs of the upper class. This shows that coastal communities and the state government-owned and shared boat culture.

According to the history of Terengganu State, a traditional boat has been used for a long time to send gold flowers to the State of Siam. In an article written by Baharin Ramly (1993) titled ‘Malay Traditional Boat Building,’ there are various types of boat produced, and each type has a unique shape. “The Jong”, a large ship, is one of the most popular and often used for trade (Mohd Yusoff, 2015).

Traditional boats from Terengganu are also divided into two main groups based on their size: small boats (called *Perahu Kecil*) and sailing boats or big boats (*Perahu Besar*). According to Mohd Yusoff (2017), there are nine types of small boats and four types of big boats, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of Boat

Small Boat (<i>Perahu Kecil</i>)	Big Boat (<i>Perahu Besar</i>)
<i>Perahu Setak</i>	<i>Perahu Dogol</i>
<i>Perahu Kajangan</i>	<i>Perahu Bedar/Anak Bedar</i>
<i>Perahu Kolek</i>	<i>Perahu Pinis Gobel</i>
<i>Perahu Payang</i>	<i>Perahu Pinis Dogol</i>
<i>Perahu Bedar</i>	
<i>Perahu Jalural</i>	
<i>Perahu Haluan Katup</i>	
<i>Perahu Gelibat</i>	
<i>Perahu Sekoci</i>	

There are four (4) types of big boats made by artisans in Terengganu, *Perahu Dogol*, *Perahu Bedar* or *Anak Bedar*, *Perahu Pinis Gobel* and *Perahu Pinis Dogol*. The largest and most beautiful boat is the *Perahu Pinis Gobel*. The front of this boat looks like a bird's beak, and the back looks like a duck's back. The boat has three sails: a triangular sail called a jib, a large sail called a lapan sail on the front mast, and a large sail called a great sail. This boat can go between 5 and 6 knots per hour.

Perahu Pinis Gobel is different from *Perahu Dogol*. The front does not look like a bird's beak, but the back is the same as *Perahu Pinis Gobel*, which looks like a back duck. Size-wise, it is the same as *Perahu Pinis Gobel* in height, width, and length. Nevertheless, coffee is getting better, and the shape of the *Perahu Anak Bedar* is different. It is smaller than other boats and has a different shape, especially in the front.

Although each boat looks similar, it has unique features and a basic structure. Figure 1 shows how the basic parts of some small boats, which are the keel (*lunas*), body (*badan*), frame (*kun*), and floor (*lantai*), look different.



Perahu Barat



Perahu Bedar



Perahu Haluan Katup



Perahu Kolek

Figure 1: Basic parts of some small traditional boats with different looks of the keel (*lunas*), body (*badan*), frame (*kun*), and floor (*lantai*)

3. METHODOLOGY

In this empirical descriptive study, a qualitative strategy was used, which included reviewing contextual documents, conducting in-depth interviews, and employing the observation method. The researcher collected several reports, journals, and books that are related to Terengganu traditional boats as part of this study. The goals of this study are to understand the process of making Terengganu Malay traditional boats and to propose an effective medium to sustain the awareness of Terengganu traditional boats for future generations. The information obtained from the documents was combined into a large database, and the content analysis method was used to perform an in-depth analysis of the data. Next the researcher conducted interviews with five (5) experts in the field, among whom was a shipbuilder. After transcribed, translated, categorised into themes, and analysed. In addition to the data collected through interviews, an observation was carried out at the Terengganu State Museum to gain a basic understanding of the traditional boat-making in Terengganu, Malaysia. These three (3) data sources were compared to one another to further establish the findings of the research.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

According to the findings of the triangulated analysis, the researcher has successfully achieved the first objective, which was to understand the procedure used to make traditional boats from *Terengganu*. According to Wan Ramli Wan Daud (1993), a craftsman is a significant person in the production of traditional boats and plays an important role in the process. Craftsmen are those who are both technical people and engineers, and they are the ones who manufacture the product. They were able to obtain acknowledgement from the community due to the combination of these two duties, which was particularly important in traditional societies of the past.

It was discovered through an interview with five different boat builders in Kampung Duyung, Terengganu; most boat builders in Terengganu are well-known for their skills. These skilled artisans can construct boats from scratch without blueprints. They create boats using the knowledge passed down from generation to generation, and their elaborate designs are produced with great precision and attention to detail. This was claimed by two (2) of the boat's builders:

“I started just observing my late father building boats. After that, I moved on to help him with simple tasks like making wooden pegs to join the wooden planks. My skills grew gradually until I could build a boat from scratch”. (Participant 3)

“Early this year, my father passed away, so I am now the only one in my family who has inherited his skills. Doing this alone is the only way to go, as nobody else has the necessary skills or willingness to continue with the boatbuilding craft,”. (Participant 5)

The expertise of the boat builders is highly respected because of the meticulous attention to detail they pay when creating, which is solely led by pure memory and experience gained in the past. As was noted earlier, the first boat builders of the past relied on something other than plans, but the number of those boat builders needs to increase. In addition, the boat builder who took part in the interviews said that traditionally, the type of wood used to manufacture the different kinds of traditional boats in Terengganu come from the *Chengal* tree. The builder of the boat provided this information. According to the findings of the observations, the fundamental structure of any Terengganu traditional boat, regardless of its size, must include the keel (*lunas*), back and front stems (*linggi*), frame (*kun*), and *buaya dalam* as shown in the diagram below (Figure 2). In this case, regardless of which boat is small or large.



Figure 2: Basic structure of a Terengganu traditional boat.

Putting the keel in place as the vessel's foundation is the very first stage in the process of building a traditional boat from the state of Terengganu. After that, the front and back stems of the boat are attached to the keel at the respective ends of the stems. The angle at which the stems are tilted will be the defining factor in how the boat will be designed, and the stems will be joined to the keel in a nearly vertical position (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The process of shaping and blending the planks to the basic concave shape of a boat

When the keel and stems have been successfully attached to one another, the planks, known as *lejang*, will be attached to the sides of the keel. The *Lepang* planks are fastened to one another using a material known as *Pasak* by the natives (Figure 4). The *Lepang* board gets its distinctive concave profile when the individual planks are heated in pairs and then bent into the desired contours using heat.

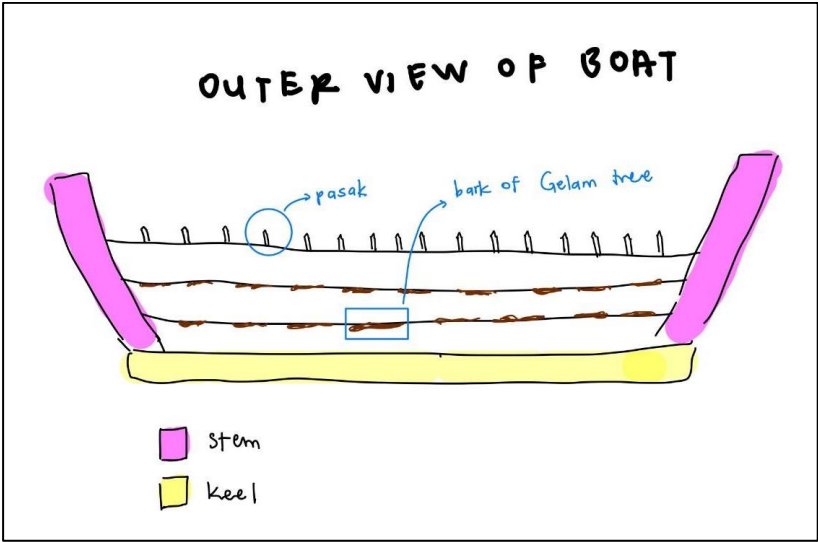


Figure 4: Sketch of the outer view of an unfinished boat

The *Penaga* tree yields the cylinder-shaped piece of wood known as *Pasak*, which measures five inches in diameter. After the holes in the *Lepang* have been drilled, *Pasak* will be placed in them to ensure that the *Lepang* can securely hold each additional *Lepang* that will be added to the body of the boat. The bark of the *Gelam* tree is placed between the planks of the *Lepang* structure so

that there is no area for air to circulate between the planks (Figure 5). When this bark comes into contact with water, it swells up and blocks any entrance for water within the boats.



Figure 5: Image of a traditional boat showing cylindrical pasak fixed in the *Lepang* planks.

After the *Lepang* planks have been put together, completing the first half of the boat's body, the frameworks supporting its body will be put in place. The dimensions of the frames will be modified so that they are an appropriate fit for the boat being constructed. For boats of lesser size, the shipwright will set the frames in place by attaching them to the *Lepang* boards at every foot of the vessel's body. The boat's torso will have its frames secured first, followed by the construction of its sides. Following the completion of the framing, the 'setel' and the '*Buaya Dalam*' will be attached together. The long timbers that unite the frames and are called "*Setel*" reinforce the frames' current position. The term "*Buaya Dalam*" refers to a structure located on the front side of the boat and holding the front structure against the strong current. The addition of the floor or roof, as well as painting, are examples of procedures that are considered accessories. The distinguishing characteristics of many traditional boats are the size, shape, and presence or absence of a roof. These fundamentals of how to design one traditional boat remain the same throughout the different styles of a traditional boat.

The study's secondary objective is proposing a potential medium for preserving the knowledge of Terengganu traditional boats for future generations. Based on the data analysis, a DIY assembly kit was proposed by taking one of the traditional boat models, *Perahu Kajangan* (Figure 6). Using the assembly model kit, children will have the opportunity to study the models of traditional boats, the structures of the boats, and the basic technique of making one. To ensure that the knowledge of Terengganu Malay traditional boats is preserved for future generations, the current generation will benefit in the long run from having access to a do-it-yourself traditional boat kit so that they can investigate and gain a better understanding of our traditional boats.

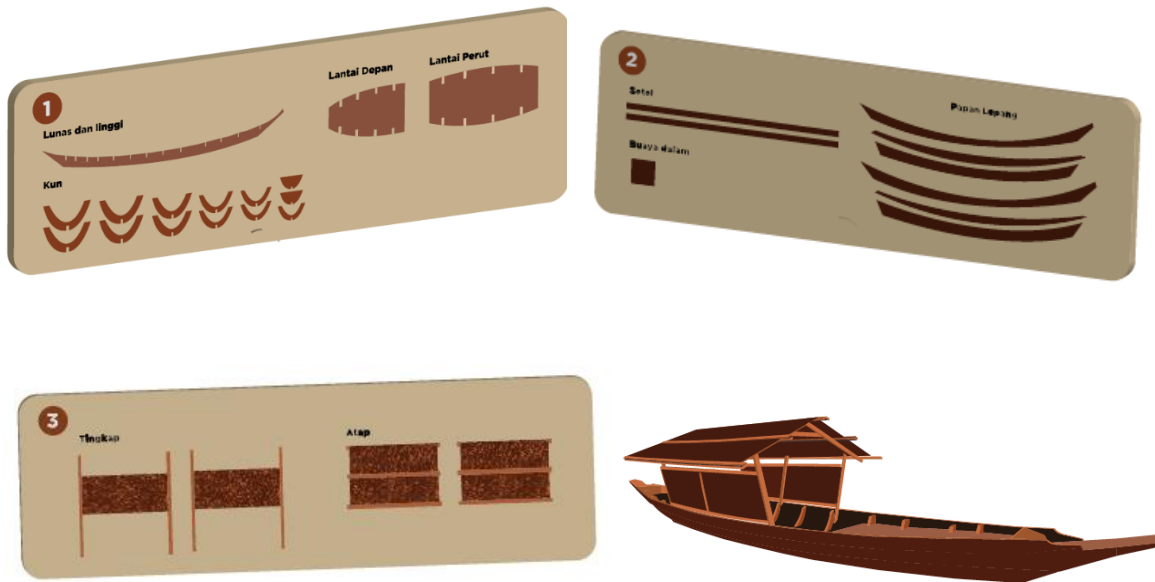


Figure 6: Example of DIY Assembly Kit

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A skilled craftsman constructed a boat using his exceptional ability, extensive knowledge, photographic memory, and unwavering dedication. The art of traditional boat building in Malaysia appears to be on the verge of extinction. Moreover, traditional boats are seeing decreased demand due to the increasing prevalence of land-based modes of transportation and the increasingly sophisticated nature of our technological capabilities. This scenario also impacted marine activity, including teaching young people how to construct boats. In addition, it is disheartening to see how younger generations are gradually forgetting or perhaps being ignorant of this period of history. Despite this, the research study consisted of a literature analysis and an interview, and the results showed that there is still a significant amount of interest in creating traditional boats. Replicas of boats are generally popular among adults, but there is room for improvement in reaching the younger generation with this concept.

Traditional Malay carpentry is known for producing works of art that focus primarily on usefulness, aesthetics, and ethics in their design and construction. As a result, to raise awareness among younger generations, this research advocated the creation of a collection of do-it-yourself kits for models of traditional Malay boats from Terengganu. These kits include ten different varieties of tiny boats. The younger generation will not only become more aware of traditional boats due to the assembly model kit, but they will also learn about the models of traditional boats, the structures of those boats, and the complex process of building one.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

NK and HR carried out the introduction and literature review sections. NK collected the data and performed the data analysis using NVIVO. HR wrote the data methodology section, the discussion and implication sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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