

A Study of Celak Form and Its Characteristics

Nurul Farida Harudin*

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor,
Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Email: nurulfarida.harudin@gmail.com*

Arba'iyah Ab. Aziz*

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor,
Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Corresponding author
Email: arbaiyah@uitm.edu.my*

Mohamad Kamal Abd. Aziz*

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor,
Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Email: mkamal054@uitm.edu.my*

Received Date: **09.11.2022**; Accepted Date: **10.07.2023**; Available Online: **15.09.2023**

**These authors contributed equally to this study*

ABSTRACT

Celak (eyeliner), which is one of the personal ornaments, has been used since Ancient Egypt and is popular, especially among Arab and Asian communities. In spite of this, prior study has revealed that many younger generations are not familiar with or are uninterested in the meaning behind the design and meaning specifically depicted on the silver container of *Celak*. This study examines the characteristics of the *Celak*. In terms of research methodology, the researcher used two types of data collection, namely primary and secondary data. The primary data in this study are observations, while the secondary data include books, journals, articles, newspapers, and websites. As a result, it has become clear that *Celak* comes in a variety of designs and motifs. The shape of the *Celak* mostly looks like a tree with two leaves on top, round and globular shapes. The uniqueness of these personal ornaments such as *Celak* can be seen through their silversmithing and this study will benefit the younger generations in acknowledging the design and meaning of *Celak*. At the end of this study, the research outcome is anticipated to be used as a reference for other students and researchers.

Keywords: *Form, Characteristics, Motif, Celak, Culture*

INTRODUCTION

The use of *Celak* (eyeliner) in Malay culture is a common thing. This was partly due to the presence of merchants from the middle eastern countries especially Arab and Persia who arrived in the Malay land in the early part of the nineteenth century for trade and expansion of Islamic religion. Initially, *Celak* was worn on the basis of religious conviction. According to Riesmeier et al. (2022) wearing a *Celak* was one of the prophet's sunnah and was thought to be beneficial to health, particularly the eye. *Celak* is one of the collections that is categorized as a collection of personal ornaments (Ibrahim, 1998). *Celak* is a cosmetic container used to store ingredients used to color the area around the wearer's eyes, making it more prominent in shape. *Celak* is ornamented with a variety of motifs, the most common of which is a floral

motif (Jolanda, 2019). It has a round and globular shape and looks like a tree with two leaves as well as various motifs such as cosmos, flora, and geometric on the top of its body.

Since the arrival of Islam, *Celak* has been utilized by the Malay ethnic. As early as the fourth century AD, Persian and Arab traders expanded their trade to the Southeast Asia region. During the late seventh century AD, the Malay Peninsula became involved with the East – West trading networks. Due to this situation, *Celak* is one of the materials that has been produced and sold extensively throughout South East Asia for centuries. The *Celak* in our culture, as with the various designs and motifs of the Malay peninsula states, has not been thoroughly identified, measured and studied in depth. A comprehensive and in-depth study of *Celak* has long been overdue and not many young people acknowledge or care about the meaning behind the form and motif in *Celak*. Due to the lack of knowledge and sense of appreciation of the younger generation communities to preserve the collection of *Celak* that they have, it is no doubt that the *Celak* will disappear in the near future (Norzehan et. al, 2009). It is an opportunity to discover and document this type of *Celak* as it is somehow influenced by the cultural practice, and can indirectly explore the local community of the area. Personal ornaments in Malay's traditional culture have a high value in our cultural heritage. It needs to be preserved and developed for the younger generation, so that they can understand and appreciate our heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of *Celak* dates back since the times of Ancient Egypt, and it was even used by the Arab communities ~~on the face~~ as an indicator of status from the 7th century. In the early 10,000 years of AD, *Celak* first appeared in the days of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. At that time, high-status males and females used *Celak* to protect their eyes from wrinkles that formed after constant exposure to the desert, sun, and hub winds (Riesmeier et al., 2022). *Celak* was first used in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia as a dark black line around the eyes. At the beginning of 1000 BC, ancient Egyptian women not only wore cosmetics for beauty but also to protect their skin from the desert sun. The Arab community believes that the use of *Celak* can protect the wearer from the evil eye. The metal container of *Celak* used by the Egyptians was made of various materials such as copper, silver, gold, and antimony (Sheppard, 1968).

Form of *Celak*

The variation of decorations of *Celak* focuses mostly on the topic as its central component. This serves as the foundation for the art of painting (sculpture etc.). On each surface of the object, a pattern is created by strategically placing many motifs of varying forms. This results in a pattern. In other words, motifs and patterns are utilized to refer to the whole of a decorative design element (Siti Zainon, 2018). Decorations on the surface of silver, copper, and gold highlight their dynamic form. Beautiful themes are inspired by the splendor of nature. According to Ibrahim (1998), each geometric line also extends throughout the silver's surface. Motif components are often obtained from natural forms such as plants and cosmos, which are then created or integrated to produce a "central motif," also known as a principal ornamental pattern. In various Malay handicrafts, a motif derived from the parts of blooming plants is considered to be the primary ornamental motif (Siti Zainon, 2018).

According to Zaleha Tasrib from Jabatan Muzium Negara (personal communication, 28 May 2022), there are a few characteristics of *Celak* such as head, stick, neck, body, mirror, pendants, chain, liners, and legs. Each characteristic has its own design that shows the uniqueness of the motif of *Celak* itself. For example, there is *Celak* which has all the characteristics mentioned and another one which has only three (3) characteristics, such as *Celak* five (5), which only has a stick, neck, and body. Lastly, according to Arba'iyah (2018) the *Celak* container is separated into two components; the top section is leaf-shaped, and a metal rod is used to spread the *Celak* across the eyelids. *Celak* powder is stored in the bottom

section. Most *Celak* motifs are shaped to look like trees, with two leaves on top.

Motifs of *Celak*

The variation of decorations focuses mostly on the topic as its central component. This serves as the foundation for the art of painting (sculpture, etc.). On each surface of the object, a pattern is created by strategically placing many motifs of varying forms. This results in a pattern. In other words, motifs and patterns are utilized to refer to the whole of a decorative design element (Siti Zainon, 2018). Decorations on the surface of silver, copper, and gold highlight their dynamic form. Beautiful themes are inspired by the splendor of nature. According to *Kraftangan Malaysia* (2005), each geometric line also extends throughout the silver's surface. Motif components are often obtained from natural forms such as plants and cosmos, which are then created or integrated to produce a "central motif," also known as a principal ornamental pattern. In various Malay handicrafts, a motif derived from the parts of blooming plants is considered to be the primary ornamental motif (Siti Zainon, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive qualitative technique was used to conduct the enquiry, which included fieldwork that included observational studies, and data collection. This enquiry combines a cultural viewpoint with a qualitative descriptive approach. Among the efforts that are part of this inquiry are collection studies and fieldwork in the form of interviews with curators and private collectors who are experts on *Celak*.

An overview of research, enquiry, information retrieval, and documentation, as well as an understanding of the study's objectives, are necessary before beginning the data collection procedure. Official photographs, audio and video recordings, observations, and site visits were all used to collect data. In Kuala Lumpur, fieldwork was done in the form of observational interviews with curators and other experts who are aware of *Celak* and collection studies. During this enquiry, a number of organizations were looked into, including the Malay World Ethnology Museum, Museum Department of Malaysia, Museum of Asian Art, Universiti Malaya (UM), and private collectors. The interviews that were conducted were with competent museum curators.

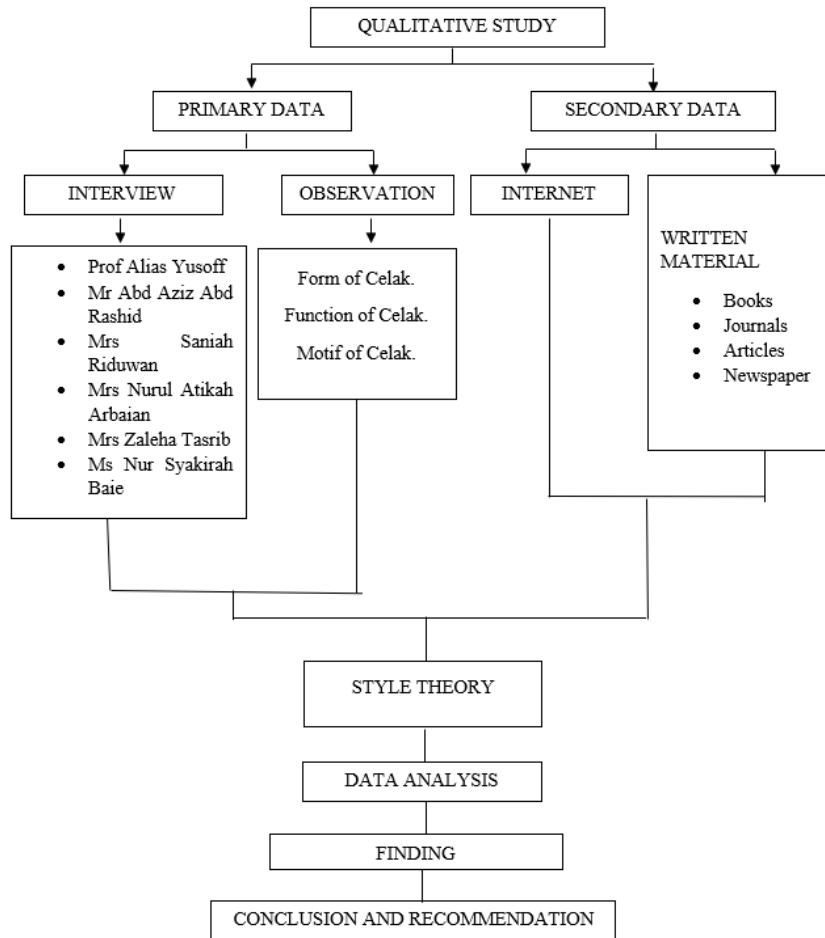


Figure 1: The Framework of Research Methodology

FINDINGS

The findings of the investigation are summarized and displayed in table format in the report. In addition, a discussion of the findings is provided to investigate the solutions to the study's issues. Most of the information comes from a collection of *Celak* that is housed in three different museums in Malaysia: The Malay World Ethnology Museum, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, and the Museum of Asian Art and from personal collectors. The purpose of the study is to classify the characteristics of the different forms of *Celak* that have been responded to. Interviews, observations, the internet, and various printed materials such as books, papers, and journals were used to collect primary and secondary data, respectively. The data was acquired from these various sources.



Figure 2. Celak from Malay World Ethnology Museum
 (Source: Malay World Ethnology Museum)

Table 1. List of characteristics of Celak 1

Celak 1	
a) Stick	Each has a different body shape and a filigree stopper. The stoppers are threaded into the bottle to keep the <i>Celak</i> powder safe and dry. Filigree stoppers have inscriptions in Arabic. The lotus petal motif is used on the upper half of the Celak. There is Arabic calligraphy in the center of the floral pattern.
b) Neck	The neck is shaped with an attractive floral petal shape. At the bottom, there is a vertical line from the neck to the body of <i>Celak</i> .
c) Body	The geometric body design of the <i>Celak</i> is seen in the central area of the Celak. In the middle, there is a thin horizontal line with a small flower pattern carved in the middle of it several times.
d) Liners	<i>Celak</i> features a <i>Daun Paku</i> pattern on the bottom. This design is a flowering ornamental plant with a stunning floral design.
e) Leg	This Celak is supported by three legs in the design of the floral motif.



Figure 3. Celak from Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
 (Source: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia)

Table 2. List of characteristics of Celak 2

Celak 2	
a) Body	The front and back of the Celak have a big rosette with stylised flowerheads and irises surrounded by other floral sprays on a surface object decorated with all background (nielloed). The sides and top have a scalloped pattern with bands strapwork on each side.
b) Stick	The motif of the stick is flora. The Celak holder has a foliage pattern. Leaf designs are also carved repeatedly on the celak's edges.
c) Neck	It has a cylindrical neck, a domed screw top, and a connected thin spatula. It has a rounded shape with slightly flattened edges and raised middle knobs. A leaf design is engraved repeatedly on the side of this Celak.
d) Pendants	Celak's sides are joined together by two connected loops and a chain with gilded crescent pendant. The moon is among the geometric elements in the design.



Figure 4. Celak from Personal collector
(Source: Personal Collector)

Table 3. List of characteristics of Celak 3

Celak 3	
a) Stick	The motif of the stick is flora. This Celak has the Arabic writing 'Ya Nur', which means 'O Light'.
b) Neck	In this part, only a transversely lined motif that is round in shape is carved repeatedly.
c) Body	Each Celak had the same form as the other collections of Celak. In the middle the Celak 6, there is a floral motif decorated with flowers in engraved open work.
d) Leg	The legs do not have any carved motifs.



Figure 5. Celak from Personal collector
(Source: Author's personal collection)

Table 4. List of characteristics of Celak 4

Celak 4	
a) Stick	The Celak sticks are threaded into the Celak to keep the charcoal powder safe and dry. The filigree stick has an engraving of the word "Pakistan". This is obtained from the Malay community.
b) Neck	Around the neck, there is a floral petal pattern motif.
c) Body	Motifs use horizontal lines, either single or several in a group. It's shown to divide the body into sections.
d) Liners	Certain Celaks have their own unique liner to support the weight. The liners have a floral motif around them that shows aesthetic value.
e) Leg	This Celak has four (4) legs. There are floral motifs engraved on the leg of Celak.

Table 5. The Characteristics of the form of Celak

No of Celak	Characteristics										
	Year	Origin	Head	Stick	Neck	Body	Mirror	Pendants	Chain	Liners	Leg
C1	1877	Malay		/	/	/				/	/
C2	1800	Ottoman		/	/	/		/			
C3	1972	Malay		/	/	/					/
C4	1980	Malay		/	/	/				/	/
Total				4	4	4		1		2	3

According to the results, through examining the characteristics of the form of *Celak* in the two (2) museums and two (2) personal collectors, it can be observed that the *Celak* in the Malay World Ethnology Museum has most of the characteristics linked to *Celak*, with the exception of the pendants and chain. There is one *Celak* from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia that has a pendant. Besides, there is one (1) *Celak* that has four characteristics from a personal collector, such as stick, neck, body and leg. Meanwhile, another collection from a personal collector has five characteristics of *Celak* such as stick, neck, body, liner, and leg.

CONCLUSION

According to the results, the chosen Celak has a variety of shaped characteristics, including a head, a stick, a neck, a body, a mirror, a pendant, chains, liners, and legs. Each *Celak* is produced differently, with its own collection of characteristics and shapes. The floral carvings on the *Celak* stick are often seen on the stick and all over the *Celak's* body since they are its most noticeable feature. *Celak* is one of the Malay history and traditions that must be kept in order to prevent the extinction of this collection of personal decorations due to its uniqueness. More research on this *Celak* has been advocated for in Malaysia. This will teach us more about the carvings on the *Celak's* stick and body, such as their forms, characteristics, and motifs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author appreciated the help and collaboration of the Museum of Malay Ethnology, the Malaysian Museum of Islamic Art, personal collectors and the assistance of Alias Yusoff, Abd Aziz Abd Rasid, Zaleha Tasrib, Nur Syakirah Baie, Nurul Atikah Arbain, and Saniah binti Riduwan in terms of research and discovery in completing this study. The author also wants to thank Arbai'yah Abd Aziz, the supervisor who frequently assisted, advised, and shared knowledge while this study was being conducted. Finally, the dedication goes to the memories of the family and everyone else who worked tirelessly in completion of this study.

REFERENCES

- Arbai'yah Ab. Aziz. (2018). *Simbolisme Dalam Motif Songket Melayu Terengganu*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Kuala Lumpur.
- Jolanda, B. (2019). *Paint it Black: A Biography of Kohl Containers*, BLKVLD Publishers.
- Ibrahim Ahmad. (1988). *Gold Jewelry and Ornaments of Malaysia*, Muzium Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Riesmeier, M., Keute, J., Veall, M. A., Borschneck, D., Stevenson, A., Garnett, A., & Devière, T. (2022). Recipes of Ancient Egyptian kohls more diverse than previously thought. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 5932.
- Sheppard, M. (1968), *Living Crafts of Malaysia*. Times Book International.
- Norzehan Adli, Zaulkifli, Jazmin, Mohd Rosli, Faizah Ali, Ahmad Fadhli, Severinus Emor. (2009). *Seni Kraf Kayu Motif dan Teknik*, Institut Kraf Negara. Malaysia.
- Siti Zainon Ismail, (2018), *Reka Bentuk Kraf Tangan Melayu Tradisi*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Malaysia.
- Syed Ahmad Jamal, (1994), *Form and Soul*. Malaysia. Stern, L. (1996)