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# **Visualizing Kelingkan Embroidery through the of Malays Styles and Motives**

**Rose Dahlina Rusli, Norwani Mohd Nawawi, Verly Veto Vermol**

College of Creative Arts,  
Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor Malaysia

[dahlina77@uitm.edu.my](mailto:dahlina77@uitm.edu.my), [nmn572000@gmail.com](mailto:nmn572000@gmail.com), [verly@uitm.edu.my](mailto:verly@uitm.edu.my)  
Tel: 012-238 3914

### **Abstract**

It was reported that in 2002, at least five kelingkan embroiderers were still practicing their craft in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, and lesser of them were still active in West Malaysia. This situation may cause stagnation in the development of this type of embroidery making, particularly in Malaysia. It may even lead to this art form becoming obsolete in the future. In fact, in the present day, the demand for kelingkan in the market is high. Malaysian fashion designers have also become responsive to the beauty of traditional embroidery to elevate them to the same sphere as exclusive international embellishments. The focus of this study is to visualize the art of Malay kelingkan through its styles and motives used. Malaysian fashion designers have also become responsive to the beauty of traditional embroidery to elevate them to the same sphere as exclusive international embellishments.

Keywords: Embroidery; Malay Costumes; Styles; Motives

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### **1.0 Introduction**

For over 3,000 years, ancient history has been recorded through objects of art, such as paintings, vases and sculptures, which represent the native civilizations. These works of art also serve to document the lifestyles of people in those early civilizations, including what they did or ate, as well as what they wore. Malay traditional costumes for an instant, have their unique history and development, which reached great heights in the 15th century, especially in the period of the Malay Sultanate of Malacca. During this period, the iconic female costumes, known as baju kurung and baju kebaya, rose to popularity among royalty, nobility, and commoners alike. (Zubaidah Shawal, 1994). Besides the development of traditional Malay costumes, the embroidery was also one of the interesting facets of Malay culture to develop around this time. Embroidery and embellishment have been used for centuries to decorate many items of women's wear and it is also to remark the diversity of world culture (Georgina O'Hara, 1998). Traders from Arab, India and China were significant contributors in influencing the development of Malay costumes, with their new range of textiles, patterns and embellishment materials. Indian and Chinese traders, for example, brought in the art of gold embroidery during the rule of the Malacca Sultanate (Richard Winstedt, 1981). During that period, gold embroidery from China was brought to Malacca and was presented as kingly gifts to the sultan. (Richard Winstedt, 1981).

Gold thread embroidery from China and the Middle East, which traders brought in, also greatly influenced local craftspeople in decorative embellishments in their hand-crafted textiles. Throughout Malay history, delicate designs and workmanship have always been incorporated into traditional crafts. In the early 1900s, Malay costumes were adorned with Songket Benang Emas and kelingkan embroidery, especially on baju kebaya pendek for women (Zubaidah Shawal, 1994). And they were made for not only royalty but also daily use, in items like kitchen wares, boats, textiles, costumes and all sorts of embroidered fabrics (Azah Aziz, 2006).

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The Malay art of embroidery refers to motifs, colours, materials, techniques and their uses. The art of embellishment is to enhance with various other materials, such as sequins and beads, gold and silver threads etc. Syed Ahmad Jamal (1992) said that embroidery is a traditional Malay art of ornamentation on fabrics using threads of various colours. There are three major embroidery techniques employed in the embellishment of Malaysian textiles and costumes, which are the art of *tekat*, *kelingkan* and *sulam goyang*, which is primarily seen on *Nyonya kebaya*. However, in the Malay world, gold thread embroidery only refers to the art of *kelingkan* and *tekat*. *Tekatekat* is a hand-stitching technique that applies gold thread onto a base of material, generally velvet. It is known as the oldest embroidery technique in Malay arts of crafts. According to Azah Aziz (1987), *tekat* is also known as *suji timbul*, which means doing something repeatedly in a series of motions due to the process of stitching the gold threads. *Tekatekat* embroidery is the most popular craft amongst the Malays and it is produced and developed mostly in Perak. *Tekatekat* is considered a refined and elevated craft, befitting of royalty and nobility.

For this reason, the Queen of Perak presented a piece of *tekat* embroidery as a royal gift to the Queen of Wales upon her visit to Singapore in 1901 (Siti Zainon Ismail, 1987). Another style of traditional Malay embroidery is known as the *kelingkan*, also known as *keringkam* among the Sarawakian-Malay community. *Kelingkan* is thought to have Middle Eastern origins and is a form of embroidery that uses flat metallic threads, which are usually gold-plated, stitched onto soft and sometimes diaphanous fabrics like silk, netting and voile. It is a technique often applied to women's shawls and traditional costumes, which are to be worn on special occasions (see Fig.1). Even though *kelingkan* embroidery is popular in Sarawak, it can also be found in Peninsular Malaysia and it is often used to decorate *kebaya labuh* and *baju kurung* (Eddy Heman Zaidel, 2005).

### 1.1 *Kelingkan* Embroidery

The origins and development of *kelingkan* are believed to have stemmed from court art. It is closely associated with Malay royal families and their appreciation for fine clothes and furnishings. In the past, commoners were not allowed to use these fine embroideries on their garments unless it was exclusively approved by royalty (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2006). As time passed, the use of these embroidered garments began to expand extensively and they became popular in all levels of Malay society, especially during wedding ceremonies and formal events. *Kelingkan* work was also done on shawls, *baju kurung*, *baju kebaya* and *baju Melayu*. In the past, *kelingkan* embroidery was especially well known in the states of Terengganu, Kedah, Kelantan, Pulau Pinang, Selangor, Johor and Sarawak. Today, *kelingkan* is more popular and made mainly in the Sarawakian-Malay community. These delicate embellishments require immense skill and time to produce, according to Syed Ahmad Jamal (1992). The most significant influence in human development is the application of skills. The expertise symbolizes the fineness of the handiwork that can measure the dynamism of the mind and one's progress.



Figure 1. Left: Malay woman wearing an embroidered *kelingkan baju kebaya* and shawl

(Source: Muzium Tekstil Malaysia,

Kuala Lumpur); Right: A piece of embroidered *kelingkan*

(Source: Rose Dahlina Rusli)

*Kelingkan* motifs come from a tremendous variety of sources, both complex and straightforward, and from peasants and nobility. They can be seen as evidence of the close relationship between the natural world and daily life in the Malay community and its culture. The motifs that are used in *kelingkan* are rather similar to those used in *tekat* embroidery, such as rose buds, *bunga kenanga*, *bunga cengkih*, *bunga lawang* and a few others (Azah Aziz, 2006, *Rupa & Gaya Busana Melayu* (see Figure 1). In this research, the development of the embroidery used in contemporary designs will be seen as a reflection of the cultural functions of costume and craft – that is, as a means of expression of the interest and values of both the individual and society whole.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Few studies and reference materials have been carried out on gold thread embroidery, especially *kelingkan* (Ab. Rahman, N., & Abdul Majid, M.(2021). Embroidery, especially *kelingkan*, a needlecraft that has been passed down through the generations, from mother to daughter, has unfortunately shown signs of decline today, as the skills are no longer being transferred to the younger generation, as well as the lack of interest from them to inherit the skills. There is no solid documentation on the design and techniques used in the *kelingkan*

embroidery as a reference for the newcomers. Along with incoming Western products, we tend to ignore the existence of our own exclusive identity that could potentially generate a comfortable income.

It was stated that only few kelingkan embroiderers were still practicing their craft in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, and none of them were still active in West Malaysia (NHZ Amri, H Haron, NSA Mutalib, (2019). This situation may cause stagnation in the development of this type of embroidery making, particularly in Malaysia. It may even lead to this art form becoming obsolete in the future. Besides mastering the techniques, there is also a need to document and identify the styles and motifs used in the kelingkan embroidery, especially those practiced by the local kelingkan embroiderer.

In other parts of the world, such as Suzhou, China, much effort is put in to ensure that such handicrafts do not stagnate and become obsolete over time. For example, the Embroidery Research Institute in Suzhou is dedicated to researching their native traditional embroidery, developing new stitches, and training new generations of needleworkers.

Due to the lack of development in kelingkan embroidery over the past decades, these unique pieces of textile heritage have not been made widely available in the current market. According to Ibrahim Ismail (2018), *Kraftangan Malaysia* aims to set a platform for the local craft and products to help local craftsmen's as one of the biggest problems local craftspeople faces is marketing their hand-made products. However, this lack of supply is not in response to the lack of demand. In fact, in the present day, the need for kelingkan products in the market is high. However, getting one may prove a significant challenge (bhnews@nstp.com.my, 2019). Malaysian fashion designers have also become responsive to the beauty of traditional embroidery, which they could use to enhance their designs and elevate them to the same sphere as exclusive international embellishments. However, some factors may stand in the way of kelingkan being used in a widespread manner.

Lack of documentation on the kelingkan embroidery led to the limited knowledge of the kelingkan motif, styles, and techniques involved in making the embroidery. There is no classification information on the motif and techniques used in the kelingkan embroidery that the young practitioner and researcher could use as a reference. Although it is an exclusive product to have, it is also very delicate, and it must be handled and stored in a unique way to keep its quality intact. It is fair to say, from a modern-day perspective, that kelingkan embroidery products are not user-friendly. Furthermore, they lack commercial value in terms of their design and make. Contemporary kelingkan designs must be developed in today's market, and efforts must be made to promote the craft to be recognized locally and internationally. Therefore, this study intends to document and suggest developments for kelingkan embroidery in its design, tools, and techniques for a more contemporary approach that could make it marketable locally and internationally.

### 3.0 Methodology

This study is undertaken as qualitative research that involves ethnographic studies of Malay society and the many influences that have helped shape it. The research is also based on analyzing historical evidence (primary data) and literature review (secondary data) to gather as much information as possible on kelingkan. Also paramount in this study is the intangible knowledge of traditional Malay embroideries, especially from those who practice kelingkan embroidery. The research gained information through unstructured interviews and collected data from actual kelingkan specimens dating from the 1900s to 2010. The discussions and samples provided the study with undocumented data on the embroidery, which was conducted in a casual environment that implemented direct and indirect questions. This was to ensure that the interviewees were as comfortable as possible. Besides conducting interviews and examining samples from personal collections, samples were also obtained from photographs and pieces from museum collections and archives and self-experimentation.

#### 3.1 Primary Data

To obtain primary data, the researcher conducted interviews with embroiderers, museum officers, cultural officers, academicians and experts on Malay costumes and crafts. The interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner. The interviewees could be more comfortable and openly share their experiences and points of view and show samples of kelingkan embroidery from their collections. Samples of kelingkan embroidery were also gathered and viewed from public museum collections, especially in Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak.

Most of the historical pieces found could not be precisely dated and furthermore, there are limited numbers of kelingkan collections in the country and in neighboring countries, such as in Indonesia and Brunei. Meanwhile, available literature and pictorial records are brief, lacking in detail, and mostly repeated from other sources. Although not much information could be gathered on this near-extinct craft, the research was not affected. It focused mainly on the tools, materials, motifs, techniques and styles in kelingkan, which could be obtained by further analysis and observations of the samples themselves. The diagram below suggests the process and flow of the study, data collection and data analysis.

#### 3.2 Secondary Data

To date, there has not been a comprehensive and in-depth study conducted on the Malay traditional embroidery known as kelingkan. Therefore, the secondary data collected in this study was mainly derived from researching the history of Malay culture, studying literature, and analyzing photographic records featuring people wearing kelingkan. This research will also look at other associated areas of study, such as the costumes and embroidery techniques of different cultures, regions, and countries, to overview the subject. This research will also examine the popular general motifs frequently used in other Malay crafts, such as textiles and woodcarving. Information will also be derived from cultural events that are related to this research.

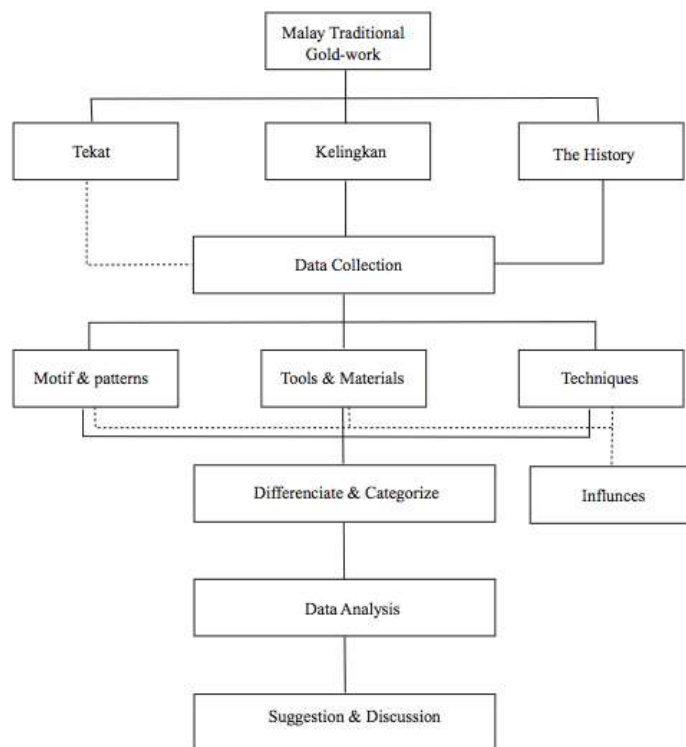


Figure 2. Research Design Flowchart

This study relied heavily on interviews for information, as this form of inquiry can uncover relevant information on Malay culture, crafts and society that might not be available through publications and archival records. Instead, this information may have been passed down through the ages via word of mouth amongst a privileged few, namely craftsmen and makers. Although semi-structured interviews may not always be reliable and accurate, it is an indispensable resource. It is vital for the researcher to truly understand the origins of the subject studied, including how it started in the past, as no detailed written documentation has been conducted on this particular subject before. In gathering as much information as possible, a range of individuals with varying types of expertise and opinions were interviewed. They included crafters, professionals, academicians as well as collectors. Besides conducting interviews and reading related literature, the researcher also conducted self-experimentation to reproduce kelingkan embroidery to discover new techniques, materials, and tools. This experimentation aims to generate and develop fresh ideas in the making of the kelingkan gold thread embroidery.

#### 4.0 Findings

The various styles and designs seen in Malay traditional crafts may have been the result of the influence of the rulers of a specific period. For example, labu sayong pottery in the state of Perak, wau kite-making in Kelantan, and silverware making in Terengganu were all carried out under the patronage of the royal courts. Most Malay crafts are designed according to the traditional Malay principles of arts and crafts (Zakaria Ali, 1989), particularly in designing, creating, and choosing materials. The essential elements of form and function are used to suit the design, operation, materials, and techniques identified by their distinct motifs and techniques that are mainly inspired by nature. For example, in woodcarving, floral motifs and patterns are used in almost every carved decoration. The motifs are carved in relief style, which requires a high level of technical skill and imagination. Generally, in Malay woodcarving, the motif known as awan larat (extending clouds) is used as a principal design, influencing the way the motif is used, including its placement and the balance between empty spaces and carved areas. The overall composition of motifs is carefully considered and planned. In some design regions, the whole plant parts are shown in relief and translated into a harmonious design. This principle of motif arrangement is also applied in other Malay crafts. For example, it is widely used in tekat, batik and silverware design, with each craft interpreting the motif according to its materials and techniques. Malay crafts have a prominent look by using their very own elements and principles of design and patterns. They can easily be differentiated from the crafts of other countries and cultures.

#### 4.1 Malay Costumes

According to Oxford English Dictionary (1978), the costume is described as an individual personal attire that includes the style of clothing, hairdo and embellishment of a particular community, nation, class or period. It also determines the originality of the styles and the tradition of a certain country. In Malay culture, traditional costume is the authentic style that has been worn by the Malay generations, including the shapes of the clothing, the fabric and embellishment used, and the coordination. The history of the Malay costume can be aligned with the history of the existence of the Malays, especially in the Malay Peninsula. As early aborigines, the Malays (both male and female) covered



themselves only on the bottom part of the body with their torsos exposed. As described by W.A Graham, the Malay man's costume consisted only of a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist, which fell to the ankles and for the women, it was a piece of cloth wrapped around their chest and pleated under the arm, known as *berkemban*. After the arrival of Islam in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Malay costume evolved, as described in the engraving of the *batu bersurat Terengganu*. The women started to cover their shoulders and sometimes their heads, as commanded by Islamic regulation. Sometimes, more than one long cloth was used along with the *kain kemban* for the shoulder and head, also known as *kain kelubung* (Abbas & Norwani, 2003). Documentation of Malay traditional costume has been well described in a book entitled *Pakai Patut Melayu* by Major Dato' Haji Mohd Said b Haji Sulaiman, (1931), a significant reference for the styles of Malay traditional costumes. Malay costumes have evolved in many ways, especially since the era of the Malaccan sultanate in 1511. As mentioned by Zubaidah Shuwal, 1994, the trade activities that flourished in Malacca influenced the locals to develop their clothing styles. The development of Malay costumes has had numerous influences from time to time, be it from India, China, the Middle East, and Europe.



Figure 3. Malay women wearing sarong as breast cloth in a style known as *berkemban* Source: W.A Graham, 1908

For centuries, Malay women wore clothes that were not much different from men's clothing (see Figure 3). This is because Malay men, women and children primarily wore sarongs before the arrival of tailoring. For women, their sarong-based costumes consisted of three sections of clothing. The first is a sarong that is worn as a skirt or hip cloth. The second is another piece of sarong worn as a breast cloth or *kemban*, and the third is a sarong worn to cover the head and shoulders called the *kelubung*. When worn for daily use by commoners, these three sarongs usually consist of inexpensive cotton fabrics like *pelikat* or simple *tenun*. But when worn by the upper class or for special occasions, the three pieces of sarongs could consist of costlier and more refined fabrics. This simple ensemble is perhaps best personified by *Cik Siti Wan Kembang*, the legendary queen regnant of the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia in the 17th century. Legend tells us that *Cik Siti Wan Kembang* was the leader of a land called *Serendah Tanah Sekebum Bunga* located at *Mount Cintawangsa, Ulu Kelantan* during the rule of *Raja Sakti I* (1650). As described by *Azah Aziz*, 2006, the outfits she wore were often comprised of luxurious fabrics of silk and gold. She wore a green *limar punca potong* cloth as a *kemban*, *limar bersongket* as a skirt and a *selendang songket* to cover her shoulders.

#### 4.2 Malay Traditional Motifs and Patterns

Generally, a motif is the main character in a design, whereby it is arranged to fill a space, thus known as a pattern (*Siti Zainon Ismail*, 1986). Most traditional Malay motifs are inspired by their surroundings, especially from nature. They are cleverly translated visually into harmonious elements and principles of design, such as lines, shapes, colours, balance, textures, and repetitions of an object (*Wan Hashim*, 1996). Indirectly, they resemble the aesthetic character *Zakaria Ali* (1989), whereby the skills of seeing and perceiving could make an artist or craftsman able to generate functional products with aesthetic value. Patterns inspired by flora and fauna were the most common in traditional Malay motifs as they are sensitive towards their environments. Flowers such as *jasmine*, *tanjung*, *cempaka*, *melor* and *kenanga* are most favoured in Malay craft and art. There are also few animals inspired motifs used in Malay craft; however, the image has been stylized or sometimes abstracted due to the Islamic restriction that it is prohibited to use any figural life image. Among the most popular stylized animal motifs are *itik pulang petang*, *lawi ayam*, *gigi yu* and *kerang-kerang*. The diversity of Malay traditional motif could be seen in every art and craft made by the locals, either in woodcarving, metalwork, textiles, ceramics, or embroidery. Besides decorative purposes of designing a motif and pattern, the Malay has their way of nitric interpretation of the design made. According to *Azza Aziz* (2006), there are high values of design aesthetic, beauty and enchantment that could be related between the creations and its mighty creator, Allah Almighty.

#### 4.3 Embroidery and Gold Thread

In ancient times, the embroidery was used as a means to mend or strengthen clothes before it became a way to adorn a surface (Shuji Tamura, 1998). Embroidery is one of the oldest methods of embellishing textiles, leather or any material that could be sewn. In Japanese, the word embroidery is known as *shishu*, which describes making a pattern with thread. As defined in the Dictionary of Fashion and Fashion Designers (pg: 93), embroidery is an art of needlework used to decorate many items, especially for women's wear. Generally, embroidery is used to embellish a surface to make it more attractive. Embroidery can be done using thread, yarn, gold-plated strips, sequins and also beads. Conventionally, embroidery skills refer to works by hand and the embroiderers have their techniques or skills in manipulating embroidery stitches onto the design made by coordinating the stitches used with the colour and shapes of the design.

Traditionally, three main stitches are used in many embroidery designs. These categories of stitches are well known worldwide, with the most basic stitch being known as the 'flat stitch.' Many embroidery stitches have been developed from the basic flat stitch, such as the satin stitch, long and short stitch and many others. The second type of stitching is known as the 'knot stitch,' used for seeding stitches and designs that need a rough texture. And finally, the last type is called the 'loop stitch.' Other stitches that are derived from this category are the chain stitch and daisy stitch. From these three categories of stitches, many different styles of embroidery stitches have arisen, says Mary Schoeser, 2003. The styles that have developed from these three basic stitches became more interesting and intricate in the world's different cultures. The use of different materials and design approaches also gives embroidery a multi-functional style and technique. In the past, embroidery was used in many ways and it served other functions all around the world. For example, embroidered items are used in many religious and cultural ceremonies, especially elegant costumes and accessories. As Mary Gostelow (1977, pg:9) mentioned, the use of color in embroidery design serves an array of significance in different countries. The use of embroideries is also symbolized for many purposes worldwide. It has been used in most cultures that existed, either the Europeans, the Middle East, or Southeast Asia. Symbolic figures and motifs are often used to reflect religions and beliefs, the power of healing, and to indicate social hierarchy.

One of the common images use in symbolizing the great divinity or spirituality is the image of a tree, universally known as the tree of life (Shiela Paine, 2008). The tree of life could be seen uses in min-soo peasant craft of Korea, Southern Syria, Palestine, Hungary and India. Although there are varieties of stylization in figuring the tree, the meaning and purpose are primarily similar. It represents the linkage between earth and heaven and the prosperous guardian from the evil spirit. As an indicator of social status, embroidery plays roles by its luxury materials and color; for example, red symbolizes happiness and serenity in India and China. In the Malay world, yellow represents wealth, royalty and majesty. Thus, embroidered pieces bearing these colours are imbued with similar meanings. Traditionally, luxury embroidery materials such as gold thread, silk thread and spangles are only used for royalties and in some places, they symbolize the great goddess.

Another popular type of embroidery is goldwork, which is renowned across cultures to symbolize high status in society, including the king and the royal family, as mentioned by Angela Thompson in her book *Textiles of South East Asia* (PG 158). Lavish goldwork is always worked onto expensive fabrics such as silk, velvet, and other luxurious fabrics usually worn by royalty and nobility. In the past, it was not uncommon for goldwork embroidery to feature real gold and precious stones to enhance the design and convey the elevated status of the owner or wearer. Many varieties of gold threads can be used in embroideries, such as gold-plated thread, gold purl thread, and twisted gold thread. As stated by Elizabeth Elvin, the Principal of the Royal School of Needlework (2003, pg: 110), metal threads that have been used for goldwork embroidery mainly originated from Asia, specifically China, and merchants brought them through the land and maritime silk routes to the far corners of the world. Goldwork embroidery can be employed in a variety of free embroidery techniques and the most commonly used are couching, the laid technique, and satin stitches. In China, gold metal threads were couched onto fabric using a second thread to hold the gold thread onto the surface of the base fabric. Traditionally, there were two ways to couch gold threads in China, which were known as *panjin* and *quanjin*. The *panjin* technique is used as a filler stitch within a design, whereby the *quanjin* technique is used to create the outline by using one or two layers of gold threads. Similarly, these techniques are used in popular forms of Malay traditional embroideries, namely *tekak* and *kelingkan* as *sulam tindih* and *tikam tembus* techniques.

Another method of creating gold thread embroidery is using hand stitches, such as the satin stitch and stem stitch. Both are the same in the embroidery stitching method (Jane Lemon, *Metal Thread Embroidery*, 2004). In most Middle Eastern countries and certain states in India, gold threads were sewn directly onto the fabric as normal embroidery stitches. However, if gold-plated threads were used, they would use loosely woven fabric so that the plated threads could easily penetrate the fabric. Goldwork embroidery in the Middle East has its distinguished history and varieties of techniques since the 12th century; although stated by J  r   (1993) stated, it was presumed that the narrow gold strips had been used in Egyptian textiles dated in 5th millennium BC. A few of the oldest techniques that have been using the gold metal thread are on a cloth known as the *Tel Kirma* and the *Assiut cloth* (Devine, 2014). *Tel Kirma* is an ancient embroidery technique known as 'broken metal' that originated from *Bartin's city* in Turkey. According to Devine (2014), the early recorded *tel kirma* in Egypt in the 18th century was approximately 1750 and 1850. There are two types of *tel karma* stitches, which are the *tel kirma* and *tel sharma*. The basic stitches of *tel kirma* are formed in the 'Z' direction on the right side, whereas on the backside, it will look like an 'X' shape. *Tel sharma* technique is by stitching satin stitch onto the motif design traced on the ground fabric. Traditionally, both *tel Kirma* and *tel Sharma* embroidery techniques are often embroidered onto woven and mesh fabrics such as muslin and voile. These embroidered cloths of *tel kirma* are normally used in the wedding ceremony as on dress known as *bindalli*, traditional headscarf known as *kina ortusu* and a pair of mitts called *kina elven*. The dress or *bindi* is usually made from silk fabric and the *ortusu* (headscarf) is made from a fine mesh fabric. The three items for the traditional wedding dress are usually made using red color fabric with a matching set of motifs used in each item.

Another famous gold thread embroidery in the Middle East country is the *Assiut cloth*, named after its state of origin from *Assiut* located in Upper Egypt. Historically, the embroidered shawl is a folk art made by the *fellaheen* women, the lower class of Egyptian women. For them, the embroidered shawl is their most luxurious treasure to keep and was only made for weddings, religious and cultural ceremonies. In general, *assiyut* is an embroidery technique derived from the *tel kirma* technique, with a stitch style known as a *tally stitch*. Although it

is the same technique as the tell kirma, the assiyut embroidery has its distinctive style. It is embroidered onto a tulle, a type of netting fabric that is locally produced in Egyptian. Initially, it was made for a mosquito net before it was refined to be suitable for clothing material. These interesting netting shawl with embroidery was found attractive by the western tourist and it becomes in demand as a special gift and souvenir.

As it became popular among tourists, the embroidered shawl became a family business for the lower class in the community where women and girls were in charge of the embroidery work. At the same time, the men are responsible for trading in the market.

In the 19th century, the modern net was introduced and had also been using for the assiyut ground cloth and became popular in France and the English. It was once reported by an English women's magazine name *La Belle Assemblée* (1816) that the wedding dress of Princess Charlotte was made of delicate tulle with a Turkish metallic embroidery technique. The uniqueness of the assiyut clothe was known all over the Western European country. It had become a symbol of wealth and styles; it had become famous as costumes for entertainment such as the opera, theatre and dance performances that have been the main reason for its popularity in the world. The motifs used in tel kirma and the assiyut techniques are mostly in design in geometric shapes due to its technicality. Motifs such as a pyramid, diamond, stars and crisscross are the most common motifs used although there are also flora and fauna-inspired designs with geometrical stylization such as the palm trees, potted plants, swan, horses and camels.

#### 4.4 The World of Embroidery

According to the *Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Fashion and Fashion Designers*, embroidery can be defined as ornamental needlework of coloured designs worked onto fabric. In fashion, the term embroidery is used to describe embellishments on the surface of the cloth to enhance the look of the fabric. The types of contemporary embroidery that we know today are based on and were developed from traditional techniques (Richard Sorger & Jenny Udale, 2006). In Malay culture, there are various types of traditional embroidery, most of which feature metallic threads. However, kelingkan embroidery is unique, as it employs the use of flattened gold-plated strips instead of threads. This form of embroidery also requires the use of a specialized flat needle with two eye holes, which is used to stitch patterns creatively onto fabric (Azah Aziz (2006). Kelingkan, also known as keringkam or kerikam in Sarawak, is a type of metallic thread embroidery that Malay rulers have been popular since the end of the 19th century. According to Toh Puan Azah Aziz (2006: 128), the word kelingkan originated from the French word "clinqant" meaning 'glittering with gold or silver; a false and showy glitter.' However, since French influences were minimal in the Malay Archipelago, it is doubtful that this art directly originated from France. On the other hand, this embroidery is also found in Turkey, India, China and parts of Europe. Therefore, it is probable that this type of embroidery was brought to the Malay world by Turkish traders through the ports of Aceh, Indonesia and Perak, Malay Peninsula. Today, these states are among the most famous for their gold and silver tekak embroidery. Kelingkan thread embroidery is very different from the technique employed in tekak gubah, as no couching is involved and the use of mempuler (inner core) is not compulsory. Kelingkan embroiderers use a specially-made needle to sew the gold threads directly into the fabric of choice. Further evidence that kelingkan may have originated from the Middle East can be found documented by Robyn Maxwell in her book, 'Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation' (revised edition), which was published in 2003. Maxwell noted that several embroidery techniques had been inspired by treasures from the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (figure 2.27). Delicate silk-net veils from the Middle East, embroidered with flat silver ribbon, were found in the collection of families in parts of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, where the "Hajj" has been an essential aspect of their religious belief.

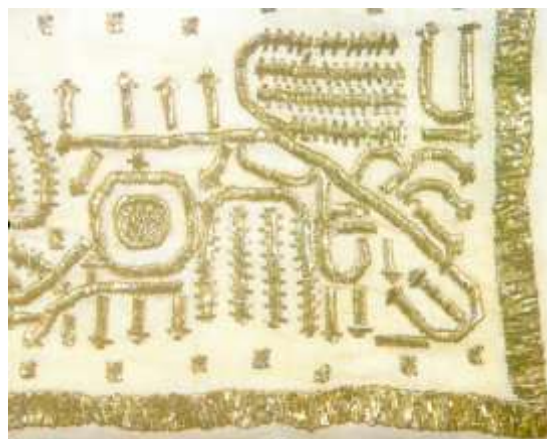


Figure 4. Turkish gold embroidery. Source: World Embroidery

Many of the embroidered Middle Eastern shawls and veils used nettings as the base fabric, but in Southeast Asia, crafts makers have adapted the use of silver ribbon embroidery on various soft fabrics, such as gauze or translucent cloth, to create fine textiles suitable for ceremonial and festive use. These clothes became treasured accessories, such as handkerchiefs, small shoulder cloths and shawls that complemented courtly dress in the Islamic sultanates of Southeast Asia (figure 2.28). These rich textiles also served to show off status and wealth.

Another possible origin of the word *kelingkan* is the British since they had colonised the Malay Peninsula from the 19th century until Malaysia's Independence in 1957, with a brief spell of Japanese Occupation in between. The British had adopted and incorporated the French word 'cliquant' as evidenced by Shakespeare's usage of the word in *Henry VIII*: "To-day the French, / All cliquant, all in gold, like heathen gods, / Shone down the English." The word has since come to be used for any showy glitter, especially something with gold decoration. The French now use it in much the same way to describe tinsel and the like. However, this word is not commonly used in daily language and it is one of those poetic terms used more for effect than the utility. As such, the British may have termed this type of gold-work embroidery as 'cliquant' and through phonetic derivation, the Malays called it *kelingkan*. Thus, it may have been that this variation of the *tekat* technique was called the *kelingkan* according to the French word to differentiate it from *tekat*.

The art of *kelingkan* embroidery was popular in the Malay Peninsula and other countries in the Malay world, including Indonesia, Brunei and Singapore. In the State of Selangor, *kelingkan* embroidery was made popular by the HRH Permaisuri Tengku Ampuan Rahimah in 1960. Due to her passion for embroidery, she learned the *kelingkan* embroidery technique and employed a skilled *kelingkan* embroiderer to make bespoke pieces only for her and her family members. According to a study conducted by Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Negeri Selangor (PADAT) in 2008, Her Royal Highness was responsible for spreading the art of *kelingkan* embroidery to other states and she even taught it to other female court members. In the state of Selangor, the *kelingkan* technique used is very different than that used in other states. In Selangor, they employ a method called the ribbon stitch.

Besides in Selangor, *kelingkan* embroidery is also used in Minangkabau wedding outfits. The bride's *baju kurung* is usually made from red velvet and embroidered with a motif known as *bintang-bintang* or stars (Syahlinar Udin, 2004, pg 81). This style of wedding attire closely resembles a West Sumatran outfit that is widely worn for formal functions.

In the Malay Peninsula, scarves of *voile* or *georgette*, embroidered with *kelingkan*, are usually worn by brides during the "akad nikah" (marriage solemnisation) ceremony. In Johor, a *kelingkan* embroidered shawl is traditionally folded and draped over the bride's shoulder (either right or left), whilst she wears a "*baju kurung Teluk Belanga*" with an outer sarong called "*Kain Dagang Luar*." This shawl is known as the "*tudung (shawl) mantul*," whereby the word *mantul* is believed to originate from the English term 'mantle' (Azah Aziz, page 128). Generally, mantle comes from the Latin word 'mantellum,' which describes a type of loose outfit worn as outerwear and a shoulder cape (Fairchild's Dictionary of Fashion (2nd edition) page 363). The beauty of the *kelingkan* shawl is often described poetically in "*pantun*" (quatrain) and other verses of Malay poetry. One example is as follows; "...kain bertabur berpanca logam diselempangkan di bahu.." (the fabric is decorated with interlocked metals scattered all over, and draped onto a shoulder).

Meanwhile, in Sarawak, this form of embroidery, also called *keringkam*, produces a short shawl or head cloth called "*selayah*" (often made from red *voile*), as shown in figure 2.29 and on a *selendang*. The difference between the *selayah* and the *selendang* is their size, whereby the *selayah* is smaller and shorter than the *selendang*. Although the size of a *selayah* can vary, according to the customer's request, the primary standard measurement of *selayah* is approximately 55 centimeters wide by 99 centimeters long. Malay women in Sarawak use it as a head covering during formal functions, such as wedding ceremonies. Generally, the origin of this embroidery in Sarawak and Borneo is believed to have come from China, Europe and India, when traders brought their trade supplies to the Malay Peninsula and onwards to the Borneo islands, including Sarawak (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2010). Margaret Brooke also mentioned these activities in 1886 when she described the numerous goods that were brought to Sarawak by the Dutch from Singapore. The arrival of the Dutch was also believed to have influenced local craft, as the Dutch pulled thread embroidery technique has also been modified into the local style of embroidery.

#### 4.0 Discussion

The researcher has endeavored to locate and gather as much reading material as possible. However, due to the lack of written documents, the researcher will try to supplement the research with photographic evidence of the *kelingkan* embroidery activities relevant to this research. The art of Malay gold thread embroidery known as *kelingkan* is very delicate and fragile in terms of how it is embroidered and must be handled. Due to this, the usage of *kelingkan* is limited and this could be the cause for its lack of popularity in this day and age. The terminologies or pronunciation differ in that Sarawak uses the term *Keringkam*, (Ismail, 1996; Pawi, 2014, Norseha, 2012; Sarkawi & Abdul Rahman, 2016). In Terengganu it is known as *teringkam* or *terekann* (Ismail, 1994) whilst in Selangor and Kelantan refer it as *kelingkan* (Jamal, 1992). Therefore, this research focuses on documenting the history of *kelingkan* and the classification of its motifs and techniques that unique to each state can be used to distinguish them. As for the motives design, due to the introduction of Islam to the Malay Peninsula, influences that used motifs from the natural world to maintain *kelingkan* embroidery persisted. Ismail (1995) also discussed the Malay community's knowledge of the natural world's components, particularly the flora and fauna, and how this understanding influenced them to produce creative arts, particularly *kelingkan* needlework. Visualizing the motives accordingly by styles or technique of the *kelingkan* will be important to researcher especially in developing and creating new design for *kelingkan* embroidery. It is hoped that *kelingkan* embroidery will become more recognized and appreciated locally and abroad through this research. The craft will be revived, and its unique history will be preserved.

#### 5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study differentiates the styles of *kelingkan* technique and the motifs used in each of these unique styles. Throughout this research, no specific written records were found on the different types or styles of *kelingkan* techniques. The researcher will try to supplement the research with photographic evidence of the *kelingkan* embroidery activities relevant to this research. Therefore, many of the traditional embroiderers themselves have failed to realize that there are, in fact, three different types of *kelingkan* techniques known to exist. It is



hoped that this in-depth study will help make kelengkapan embroidery better known throughout the country, as it is as exclusive and refined as its peer, tekak embroidery, which is still well known today. It is hope from this study, more innovations to the embroidery can be performed, from the use of tools and materials to styles and techniques, as well as other supporting elements that could help make kelengkapan embroidery more contemporary and user friendly in the future. In this particular study, three methods are applied to achieve the three objectives set for the study. The first is data analysis, which is carried out on all information collected directly from the kelengkapan practitioners and experts, as well as related bodies, which were the primary sources for this study. This was carried out purposefully to yield detailed documentation on the function and formalistic characteristics of the kelengkapan. Secondly, research will be conducted by gathering and classifying motifs and patterns that have been used in the kelengkapan embroidery. Data will then be described accordingly to the suitable category. Finally, complete data analysis will be conducted as a visual descriptive method by reviewing samples of existing embroidery pieces to identify the materials and techniques used in most kelengkapan embroideries.

Traditional Malay garments or costumes, it is more prudent to confine the vast range of clothing worn by the Malays into two main segments, as defined in past societies. The first segment represents the garments of the royals and nobility, while the second segment encompasses the commoners. In general, due to their wealth and status, royalty and nobility can enjoy a broader range of more beautiful, complex and expensive fabrics. On the other hand, commoners often wear simpler and cheaper garments due to their lack of resources. In fact, in the olden days, the sultans forbade commoners from wearing certain types of expensive fabrics, such as songket and tekak, which were strictly reserved for the royals or certain members of the court who have been awarded special honors and privileges.

Nevertheless, commoners or the rakyat are sometimes allowed to wear these expensive and sumptuous fabrics, but only on certain occasions, such as their wedding day. In Malay weddings, the bride and groom are considered a 'king and queen' for the day. In the context of this study, the royals and nobility garments are considered the traditional costumes of the Malays. In ethnography, these garments comprised expensive materials, such as the gold threads found in songket, tekak and embroidered fabrics imported from other countries. As mentioned by Tenas Effendy, Malay court attire that was worn especially for royal events was made by a variety of luxurious fabrics and designs. These include woven fabrics with gold-plated embroidery, as well as the telepuk fabric. During the Golden Era of Malacca, more varied and luxurious fabrics were introduced into the Malay world through trade, such as silks like damasks and satins and brocades. The costumes of the Malays, too became more sophisticated in style and quality. In response, local artisans started to produce more expensive and beautiful fabrics, such as the songket. Adornments such as metal thread embroidery and gold leaf were added to increase the quality and value of the fabrics. As such, various styles also developed and became more varied according to regional tastes. These styles became established and formed the distinct identities of the different states. The different ethnicities, like the Acehnese, Javanese, and Bugis, also have distinctive styles in terms of traditional costumes and textiles, which they have preserved today.

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