

## Development Phase of Traditional Dance in the State of Perak, Malaysia: A Literature Review

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### Abstract

This paper aims to review literature regarding the development phase of traditional dance in the state of Perak, Malaysia. This development phase will be looked into by reviewing Perak's history, with a focus on the art of Malay traditional dance. Based on this literature review, it is found that there is difficulty in finding reference materials on the traditional dance of Perak as there is a lack of documentation. Parts of the literature being reviewed include (i) the history of Perak, (ii) culture in general, (iii) traditional arts in Perak, and (iv) traditional dance in Perak. Each topic is discussed, exploring the existence of the art of traditional dance in Perak that brought about cultural symbols in each area of the state. In this paper, cultural symbol refers to traditional dance, that went through a development phase in Perak and was passed down generation by generation until today, has evolved due to sociological factors among the people of Perak. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the development of traditional dance in Perak is of significant importance to ensure that this art form can still be witnessed in the future.

**Keywords:** *Malay Traditional Dance*, Culture, Arts, Perak, Malaysia

### Introduction

Strong social relations among the people of Malaysia are important for a diverse community to live in harmony. Universal forms of communication that exist among the Malaysian people include various forms, and one of them is through dance. Dance is a universal medium of non-verbal communication. It is formed among the people, through which the culture of a race

can be appreciated. According to Bagong Kussudiardjo (1981), dance is the beauty of movement of parts of the human body, soulful and melodic. In other words, the art of dance can be defined as the beauty of the human form that moves melodically and harmoniously. This literature review will discuss previous studies regarding the history, culture and heritage of traditional dance in the state of Perak.

This problem of statement is to look at the strategies used by the National Cultural and Arts Department in providing information as well as giving the profile development of cultural arts in Malaysia. Rigorous efforts have been done to promote the arts product to the community and tourist. In Malaysia, the categorization of performing arts are divided into three aspects of arts categories that are dance, music and theater (Traditional Theater). The rapid development in dance plays an important role in the sustainability of cultural arts in Malaysia. This research focuses on traditional folk dance in Perak Darul Ridzuan. This research aims to seek if the traditional folk dance which existed a long time ago are still preserved to current time. This re-strengthening phase indicate the relevancy, maturity as well as the perfection of the traditional dance heritage which symbolized the richness of cultural identity. This brings to the elements that serve as the main role of two agents that are cultural institute and society.

In a book "Tempat-Tempat Bersejarah, Perak" written by N.A Halim (1981), the history of Perak is briefly discussed. Perak is the fourth-largest state in Malaysia after Sarawak, Sabah and Pahang, and lies on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. During pre-historic times, humans already had a culture that shaped their way of life. Dance in the Malay world functioned as a complement to this way of life of the Malay community. According to Mohd Ghouse Nasaruddin (1994), the development of Malay traditional dance began from simple ritualistic movements, which then became folk dances and further developed to become court dances which are more complex and delicate in nature. This literature review referenced several books, including "Masyarakat Budaya Dan Perubahan" by Rahimah Abd. Aziz, "Warisan Kesenian Perak" by Omar Farouk Bajunid, "Kesenian Tari" by Asmad, and "Beberapa teori sosiologi tentang struktur masyarakat", a translation by Soerjono Soekonto.

These books were chosen to try to find connections on several aspects that will be looked into in this review. The book by Omar Farouk Bajunid "Warisan Kesenian Perak" that was published in 1989 documents the heritage of arts and traditional dance in Perak. This book explores the history, origins and performance methods of these traditional dances. Also elaborated on in the book are the efforts of conservation of these art forms that have been handed down since decades ago, so that they continue to be a rich and cultural heritage that is still being preserved to this day.

The book "Masyarakat Budaya dan perubahan" written by Rahimah Abd. Aziz describes a group of people that interact in an ascertained area and guided by a shared culture. Social change is cultural and social institutional transformation resulting over a period of time that brings about positive and/or negative effects. This process does not necessarily happen at the same rate or speed, nor at the same force. According to the book "Senarai Darjah Kebesaran Dan Gelaran Melayu" published by Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (2014), it is mentioned that the state of Perak Darul Ridzuan has existed since pre-historic times. Kota Tampan, in Lenggong, is an area that proves the existence of the Old Stone Age (Paleolithic era) in Malaya. Perak then went through the Hoabinhian period, the New Stone Age (Neolithic era) and the Bronze Age. Perak's history began in 1528 with the coronation of Sultan Mudzaffar Syah 1, a descendant of Sultan Mahmud Syah of Malacca. According to N.A. Halim

(1981), through those pre-historic times, humans began to develop a culture that shaped their way of life.

In terms of geography, Perak is the second-largest state in Peninsular Malaysia behind Pahang with an area of 21,035 square kilometres, making up 6.4% of the total area of Malaysia. The state is divided into 10 districts, including Batang Padang, Kinta, Kuala Kangsar, Larut, Matang and Selama. Perak has a population of nearly 2,352,743 people. Being rich in tin ore, Perak was once fought over by foreign powers such as the Acehnese, the Bugis and the Dutch, who all wanted a share of the tin ore market.

According to Khoo Kay Kim (1981), the centre of Perak's ruling power was at the estuary of the Sungai Perak, or Perak River, and this was where the Perak kings used to live. Perak, like other Malay kingdoms, also had their conquered colonies. In the North, Sungai Kerian was fought over by the states of Perak and Kedah. In the South, the state of Perak fought with the state of Selangor for Sungai Bernam. According to N.A Halim (1981), Perak is the fourth-largest state in Malaysia after Sarawak, Sabah and Pahang. Perak lies on the west of Peninsular Malaysia, with a latitude of 100°-102°, and longitude of 3°-6°. The area of Perak is roughly 12,800 sq km. Before historical times, Perak went through several phases including the Paleolithic period, the Mesolithic period, the Neolithic period, and also the Bronze Age.

The culture that exists now started in pre-historic times. This culture shaped the way of life for humans, and even though they did not yet have writing skills, they were skilled in other ways including producing items for usage in their daily life. Even with the introduction of religion by foreigners during the first century AD, influence from cultural aspects from pre-historic times still remained and can be seen until today, such as the cave paintings at Gunung Panjang in the Tambun area. N.A Halim (1981) also described historical relics left behind such as axe and picks made from stone, as well as pots made from clay. These tools were found during excavations by archaeologists in caves and riverbanks. The arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism during the first century AD slowly removed the influence of prehistoric times in Perak, as these religions gradually caught the interest of the Perak locals.

However, it is not known how far-reaching the influence of religion was as only a few religious idols were found, such as the statue of Buddha with eight hands known as Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and other smaller idols. Still, this confirms that religious influence already existed in Perak in the 5th to 6th centuries. When Islam came to Perak in the 13th century, it was more easily received by the locals and it did not take long for Islam to flourish in the Malay Archipelago, to the point that it surpassed Hinduism and Buddhism. With Islam taking foot in Perak, its kingdoms also became characteristically Islamic, such as the kingdoms of Beruas and Manjung. The Perak Sultanate began in the 16th century after Malacca was taken over by the Portuguese in 1511, with Sultan Mahmud Syah of Malacca's second son, Raja Muzaffar Syah, becoming the Sultan of Perak in 1528.

According to oral stories received by His Majesty Sultan Idris Al-Mutawakkil Alallahi Syah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Iskandar Syah who ruled Perak, the dignitaries of Perak had requested Tun Saban to invite Raja Muzaffar to become the King of Perak. Perak was combined with other states including Sabah and Sarawak to become the nation of Malaysia in 1963, consisting of 13 states. States ruled by sultans were kept under the sultanate ruling system but straits states, consisting of Pulau Pinang and Melaka as well as Sabah and Sarawak, were placed under the Dipertua Negeri who are appointed by the DYMM Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Dipertuan Agong. Perak was ruled by DYMM Paduka Seri Sultan Idris Al- Mutawakkil Alallahi Syah, the 33rd sultan descended from a lineage that began with Sultan Muzaffar Syah (I) ascended the throne in 1528.

According to A.Halim Nasir (1977), Perak has an area of 8,110 square miles, with a length from north to south of 155.5 miles and a width from east to west of 96 miles. On the north, it borders with Kedah, Thailand and Seberang Perai. A river named Krian acts as a border between Perak and the state of Kedah, and it flows towards Seberang Perai. Also on its north lies a thick jungle, situated at Hulu Perak. On its east, Perak borders with the state of Kelantan by a mountain range known as the Banjaran Gunung Titiwangsa from north to south. This mountain range consists of several tall mountains including Gunung Kerbu (7,160 feet), Gunung Batu Putih (6,993 feet), Gunung Bergading (5,381 feet), Gunung Cabang (5,616 feet), and Gunung Duri (5,027 feet). The eastern part of Perak is mountainous with highlands while gradually lower and flat towards the west. Thick jungle can be found here in the east, as well as the beginning of many rivers.

The southern part of Perak borders Selangor, and Sungai Bernam is taken to be its border. It is flatter and not so hilly, but with a lot of marshlands that are not suitable for farming activities. On its western side, Perak borders the Straits of Malacca with a shoreline of around 90 miles from north to south. There are a few rivers that flow from here towards the Straits of Malacca, including Sungai Perak (the longest and biggest river in Perak), Sungai Dinding, Sungai Beruas, Sungai Limau, Sungai Jarum Emas, Sungai Terong, Sungai Tiram Buruk, and a few other smaller rivers. Because of its proximity to the sea, its lands are low with many mangroves.

According to A Halim Nasir (1977), it is not certain how the name Perak came to be. Based on his research throughout the state, there were a few stories told by the locals regarding the origin of the name of Perak. In olden times, Sungai Perak flowed towards Sungai Dinding, thus the river came to be known as Sungai Dinding. Then, there were a few occurrences of floods in Perak (at that time it was yet to be named Perak) and Sungai Dinding, in the area of Kampung Aji, that disrupted its flow towards a river that was given the name Sungai Kinta. Sungai Kinta lies to the south of Sungai Dinding and its bay is now known as Teluk Aman. At that time, there was a village called Chegar Galah in the district of Kuala Kangsar that had a river flowing towards Sungai Dinding and is now known as Sungai Perak. It is said that it got its name from the white-coloured fish that swam in it, giving it a silvery sheen, thus causing the local people to call it Sungai Perak.

Outsiders began moving to Chegar Galah in Perak to trade and barter, using the route through Telok Anson towards Sungai Dinding, with only the locals knowing of its name as being Sungai Perak. As people became used to saying that they were en route to Sungai Perak, the name of the river stuck and the area also gradually became known as Perak. The areas along Sungai Perak soon became populated and was ruled by those in power. It is also believed that at that time, the flat land near the riverbank of Sungai Perak was not yet called Perak. Therefore, the name Perak was taken from a small river that is until now still called Sungai Perak in the village of Chegar Galah, situated about 15 miles from the royal town of Kuala Kangsar. The cape of the river is called Tanjung Perak to this day.

The people of Perak is made up of the three biggest races in Malaysia, that is Malay, Chinese and Indian. Other races that can be found in Perak include a small group of Thais, Portuguese and Orang Asli. The Malays were the earliest to settle in Perak, and consisted of Malay ethnic groups such as Jawa, Mendailing, Patani, Minangkabau, Kurinci, Aceh, Rawa, Bugis, Banjar, Malay Indians and Malay Arabs. However, these were all generally called the Malays. The Javanese mostly lived at Hilir Perak that encompassed Telok Akson, Batak Rabbit, Bagan Datok, Sungai Manik and a few other places along the shores of Perak. The Mendailing and Rawa people were mostly living in the areas of Kampar, Gopeng, Tanjung Malim, and

Kampung Mendailing at Gua Balak. These people were mostly from Selangor, escaping the war between the followers of King Mahadi (with support from the Mendailing and Rawa people) and the followers of Raja Abdullah (supported by Yap Ah Loy and Tengku Kudin). Due to Mahadi's loss, the Mendailing and Rawa people had to relocate to Perak. The Bugis people can be found in Kuala Kangsar, especially in the parts of Kota Lama Kiri and Sayong. There were not many Minangkabau people in Perak, as these people lived together with the other ethnic groups without having any specific village or settlement of their own.

There were also some Aceh people in Perak, even though the state had been ruled by them in a certain time in history. The Banjar people mostly lived near Sungai Manik and villages in the district of Teluk Anson, such as Bukit Merah and Gunung Semanggol. They were originally from Banjarmasin in Kalimantan, Indonesia. The Kurinci people were from the district of Kurinci in the Sumatera islands but were so few in number in Perak that they did not have their own village. At Hulu Perak were the Patani people, originating from Patani in Thailand, and could be found in Selama and Batu Kurau. In Hilir Perak, there were also Malays that had mixed marriages, such as the Malay Indians and Malay Arabs (that were called Syed). Even though there were many ethnicities, these people were collectively called the Malays or Bumiputera.

According to Ishak Saat (2011), the rise of the radical group of Malays in Malaya could be divided into a few paths, based on factors that were built upon the fighting principles of the proponents of radicalism. Radicalism that was in Perak did not differ much from radicalism that came to Malaysia in general. The rise of Islam in Malaya was pioneered by the religious groups from Perak. However, the British had categorised this Islamic movement as a radical movement. Religious radicalism in Perak was initiated by movements such as MATA, PAS and others. Islam spread throughout Malaya through Islamic preachers and intellectuals that at the time caught the interest of both Malay royalty and commoners. Good relations between the rulers and the Islamic scholars brought about their appointment as palace officers, teachers, religious judge and also palace dignitaries to play a role in the spread of Islam. In Perak, Islamic teachings spread especially towards the north, in line with the influence of Kaum Muda that came to Malaya in the 20th century. Thus, Islam is seen to be a big factor that shaped the way of thinking of the Malays in standing up for their rights.

## **Discussion**

According to Bambang Widiyanto (2001), anthropologists like to use the concept of culture, evolution and adaptation. According to Koentjaraningrat (1980), culture is a system of concepts, actions and also works in the life of a community. Community life is the aim of a people or a country, like a framework or a blue-print. Culture is the adjective that marks the viewpoint of a problem. The perspective of culture looks to the norm and values that lie in a concept, behaviour as well as works of man. Ideology is a concept in culture that was created and arranged as a guide for a country. According to Jakob Oetama (2009) through his book "Bersyukur dan Menggugat Diri", phenomenon such as globalisation had the help of information technology, where communication between parts of the world became easier, creating an easily adaptable and characteristically static culture.

In addition, Malaysia is made up of many races and peoples. The people of this country is said to be made up of 200 ethnicities that have various religions, cultures, languages and dialects. The word ethnic comes from the Greek word "ethos" that means people. The theory by J.S Furnival (1948) and M.G Smith (1965) says that the concept of a multiracial community is to

classify the people that exist in Southeast Asia. J.S Furnival was the first person to put forth the concept of multiracial community based on his studies in Indonesia and Burma.

A diverse population is made up of different races with their own cultures, religions, languages and traditions. The word culture is often related to anthropology, though the field of anthropology does not have exclusive rights to the usage of this term. Artists including dancers, painters and others, even governments, also use this term. This concept is used in anthropology and it has spread widely among the people that anthropology is a field to study cultures. An anthropologist that tries to compile the definitions made for culture will find that there are more than 160 definitions that exist. One of the definitions was made by Ralph Linton who said that the definition of culture is different from the meaning of culture in everyday life.

In the translation by Soerjono Soekonto "Beberapa Teori Sosiologi Tentang Struktur Masyarakat", a few sociology theories and ideas from western experts were debated. An interesting topic in this book is "Kebudayaan Sebagai Faktor Penentu Dalam Perubahan Sosial", a debate based on writing by Mc. Iver dan Page titled "Culture as a Determinant of Social Change". In this issue, some say that culture should be seen as a dynamic factor in social change. This is because there are many experts who admit that there is a strong relationship between social institutions and social relationships. Thus all cultural change must relate to social change, as the social factor relates strongly with the cultural factor.

The first book about Malay art forms entitled "Kesenian Tari" by Asmad was published in 1990. His writings leaned more towards dances from other states in Malaysia such as the Zapin dance from Johor, the Piring dance from Negeri Sembilan, the Wau Bulan dance from Kelantan, and the Ulik Mayang dance from Terengganu. He also provided information on the types of dance that exist in Malaysia. From this book, the researcher found that there was no emphasis placed on the traditional dances from Perak nor was there any elaboration on the changes that occurred. It can be concluded that traditional dances of Perak that have been handed down until now have gone through its own phase of change due to sociological factors among the people of Perak. Therefore, efforts to rebuild the foundation of traditional dance in Perak is of utmost importance to ensure this art form can still be seen and experienced in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the researcher's review, it is found that there is a lack of books and materials that write about the development of traditional folk dance in Perak. Even though Omar Farouk Bajunid has written the book "Warisan Kesenian Perak", but the researcher feels that there is still not enough extensive and comprehensive explanation regarding the development phases of Perak's traditional dance. There is also no book that writes about how folk dance in Malaysia can be sustained. This is of significant importance not only in further developing the identity of folk dance but also in giving people the opportunity to learn more about Malaysia's culture. Thus it is crucial to have more published material regarding the history of dance heritage in Malaysia. The findings show that there are collaboration between the cultural institute and community in administering the product of traditional folk dance as a sustainable form of cultural arts. The transactions appear to be more effective through the social network such as Facebook, Instagram and Blog. However, lack of documentation has caused the data to focus just on the interviews. This is the limitation for future studies in the aspect of form, style and function of dance in Perak.

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