

# **PROPOSED LOCAL ART CRITICISM'S MODEL FOR TRADITIONAL CERAMIC : MAMBONG POTTERY AS CASE STUDY**

**Iwan Zahar**

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, MALAYSIA  
iwanzahar38@gmail.com

## **ABSTRACT**

Malaysia have various crafts include crafts for religious purpose, however, we are still using Feldman's art criticism model. Feldman's criticism model do not accommodate contextual value of the crafts and is not made to judge crafts. Most of art lecturers are familiar with Feldman's art criticism model because its simplicity which only four phases; describe, analyze, interpret, and judge. This study used content analysis and interviewed two postgraduate students who studied pottery in Mambong Village. I modify Feldman's art criticism model and propose three phase model; internal, original and historical context. Internal context; description include visual and material descriptions, how pottery or handicraft is made, original context; styles, values, principle design within local context, compare and contrast, examine original and other country influences the styles and historical context: historical moments, events, and trends relate to handicraft, how other interpreters have understood it, where it has been placed in the history of art. The model will help student or researchers to evaluate and appreciate the value of crafts including religious crafts. Students will not only know how to judge the quality of the crafts, but they will also appreciate the history and cultural context of the crafts.

**Key words:** local art criticism model, Mambong pottery, Traditional Pottery

## **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia have many various crafts such as kite, pottery, woodcraft and carving, textiles and embroidery, metalwork, and also ceremonial crafts (Ahmad Jamal, 2007). However, there is no art criticism model for craft, especially traditional pottery. Although Feldman's art criticism model is very popular among the art teachers in USA, but Feldman's model is purposed for formalism arts at 1940 to 1960 (Feldman, 1967, Prater, 2002, Tekiner, 2006). Most of art lecturers are familiar with Feldman's art criticism model because its simplicity which only four phases; describe, analyze, interpret, and judge. The Feldman method is concerned only with the intrinsic or visible aspects of artworks. It does not require any external information, or facts about the artwork that cannot be viewed in the artwork itself. Feldman's criticism model do not accommodate contextual value of the crafts and is not made to judge crafts in the absence of contextual information.

Formalists evaluate art according to physical qualities such as color, size, shape, line, texture, and so on, and treat the ideational content of works as irrelevant. They view themselves as being mainly protectors and upholders of high aesthetic standards. Many art critics now favor "contextual" approaches (Tekiner, 2006). This content analysis research (Berg, 2001) will try to find appropriate criticism model for pottery by integrating the pottery analysis into the model. This research will examine all publications which relate to Mambong ceramic and evaluate Mambong ceramic in Kelantan. Unstructured interview (Robin Legard, R., Keegan, J. and Ward, K. (2003) is carried on two post graduate student who make research on Mambong village.

### **Art Criticism model theory and Pottery analysis**

Feldman believes that student must first understand elements and principles of design when appreciate to works of art. Feldman develop his model as the one way in which all art could be viewed, written about and discussed. Feldman developed the model at the height of modernism (Taylor and Carpenter, 2007). According to Prater, Feldman's criticism model will not be suitable for handicrafts or ceremonial crafts. Prater proposed a few modifications to Feldman's formalist model that make it easier to use with a wide range of artwork. Prater added contextual approach so students can learn historical and cultural context. At final stage, Feldman's criticism model use criteria to judge an artwork's success and select the appropriate category. The categories are: Imitationalism: Art in which the artist is imitating a subject, Emotionalism: Art in which the artist is expressing emotions, moods or ideas, Formalism: Art in which the artist is focused on the abstract qualities of the composition. Prater added Functionalism: Art in which the artist is making art for ceremonial purpose (Prater, 2002). In comparison with pottery analysis, the archeological try to categorize vessels by certain feature such as form; bowl, jar, plate, and cup are equivalent, unordered dimensions of form, and morphological type. "This is called paradigmatic classification which have three characters: Firstly, all of the definitive criteria are equivalent; that is, none is or can be weighted over any other; Second, a second important characteristic of paradigmatic classes is that they are unambiguous, both in terms of their internal structure and in terms of their application as a means for creating groups of phenomena. This results from the dimensional characteristics of the features used in definition. All the features of a single dimension are mutually exclusive; third, the characteristic of paradigmatic classes is that they are comparable with all other classes in the same classification, and that the basis of comparability is explicitly established by the form of the classification" (Dunnell, 1971). Other classification is Taxonomic which is more broadly defined simply as creating type, which analyzes attributes to isolate and describe mode. Modes are the analyst judges to reflect community wide standards for manufacturing and using the ancient artifacts. A mode is defined any concept, or custom who control the behavior of artisans of a community which they passed from generation to generation. Taxonomic classification involve formulating a single set of classes, one for each kind of artifact in the collection (Route, 1960). I will try to integrate pottery analysis into art criticism model which consist of three steps; internal context, original context and historical context. The other sub skills will be placed under the three steps.

## Internal Context

### *Visual and material descriptions*

Description emphasize on recognizing, decoding and coding, and analyzing the literal, illusion, and expressive properties in a visual image. The learners record the title and artist and describe subject matter, what's going on, and the element of arts. The learners will count on religious or divine subject matter, If they describe puppet characters which can be divided into three; divine, semi divine or human characters. However, not all handicrafts are made to be used religious purposes or moral lessons. Old Mambong ceramics were made for house hold products such as stoneware, cookware, pitcher, censer, and lamp enclose. The new Mambong ceramics change in functions and in appearance becoming display in the house (Siti Mariam, personal communication, July 8, 2014). Description of pottery consist of anatomy of vessel and surface decoration. Surface decoration involve description of structural elements and design elements. Description anatomy of vessel include vessel proportions (as ratio of height to diameter) and shape categories. The vessels can be divided into five vessel forms: plate, dish, bowl, jar, and vase (Smith, 1955, Sablof, 1975). Other description of vessels based on contours, proportion and eschews quasi-functional term such as jar and bowl (Shepard, 1976). Another approaches to identify vessel shapes are based on volume or geometry. The vessel shapes can be divided into three solids; sphere, ellipsoid, and ovaloid and three surfaces: cylinder, cone, and hyperboloid (Shepard, 1976). This description leads to classify the pottery.

Nearly all art criticism model points the process in making art is important to be considered. Pottery is clay that is modelled, dried, and fired, usually with a glaze or finish, into a vessel or decorative object. Archaeologist appreciate potters 'skills and of their ability to learn from from trial and error to mould the clay without wheel or prewheel method (Shepard, 1976). Clay is a natural product dug from the earth, clay mixed with additives that give the clay different properties when worked and fired; thus pottery is not made from raw clay but a mixture of clay and other materials. In mambong village, clay are not mixed with additives or chemicals. The Mambong'potters dig the clay from the earth, dried it and crush it with pestle. Mambong potters combined two methods; prewheel method and wheel method. Mambong potters use manual wheel to finish the products (Siti Mariam, personal communications, 5 August 2014).

The potters can form their product in one of many ways. Clay may be modelled by hand or with the assistance of a potter's wheel, may be jiggered using a tool that copies the form of a master model onto a production piece, may be poured into a mould and dried, or cut or stamped into squares or slabs. The methods for forming pottery is as varied as the artisans who create them. Most of Mambong's potters are middle ages women. They mixed the clay with water in order to be modelled and shaped by hand. They decorated the clay with many motifs. After they dried the clay, then they fired to a temperature high enough to mature the clay. Mambong pottery has neither used any painted on the surface nor dipped in the glaze.

### **Original Context**

Style is a complex concept that is applied in a number of disciplines. Style in anthropology emphasize communication and information transfer. Styles are generally considered visual representations, specific to particular context of time and place. Styles can at least inform about the identity of the society that produced the style and about the situation. In another word, style can be described as the space to be decorated and the way that space filled. The formal qualities of styles concern particular elements, motifs, configurations, and decorative layouts (Rice, 1987). Styles of handicraft usually are static and nearly no changed for hundred years or even thousand years. Gombrich (1960) claimed that many of traditional Chinese paintings or Spink statue used nearly the same technique from one generation to next generations. Egyptian art changed very little for three thousand years (Gombrich, 1995). Styles are comprehended, expression such as representational, naturalistic, abstract, iconic or geometric. Style in Mambong ceramic has also no changed since the scholars dated since 1968. 39 old motifs in old ceramic which can be seen in Kelantan Museum and 3 new motifs which can be found in recent productions. The new motifs consist of small leaves, *Paddy bud* and S shape. (Siti Mariam, personal communication, July 8, 2014).

### **Values**

This terminology is different with values in element of design. Values in element of design describes relative degree of lightness and darkness in the pictures, but values at ceramics is seen by the content of styles which are consisted from visual images and spatial arrangements. Aziz and Enoch et. al. (2011) applied Gestalt theory and Golden section rule, to identify the unique heritage values in Kelantan ceramics that could be sustained as genius loci. They applied shape and arrangements of motifs which correspondent with Islamic values. Also they counted the odd number and stated that the decorative pattern of Mambong pottery is conformed to belief system in Mambong society. However, they did not compared with Islamic symmetrical designs (Enoch, personal communication, July 8, 2014). Most of the decorative patterns comprises of elements arranged in odd numbers (i.e. 3, 5) which represent the Islamic belief. The presence of circular and crescent shapes in most of the patterns can also be correlated with the Islamic belief in moon, which is often represented with a round or crescent shape. The proportional arrangements of the decorative patterns which have been identified to follow the golden section rule and prove their timeless beauty across culture and time.

### **Element of art and Principle design**

Element of art will consist of line, shape, form, space, texture, value and color. Basic elements and combination of element that are used in Ceramic to form larger components of the decoration (Washburn, 1977). The decoration appears on the surface area which divides into structural and design elements. Bands, lines and dividers construct the structure elements and animal motifs construct the design elements. Structures of the decorative layout are arranged by elements and motifs. The basic unit may correspond to different design levels in different communities (Rice, 1987). Mambong pottery has animal motifs such as birds, fish, mountain, flowers and also natural cosmos such as stars, sun and moon (Tajul, Harozila, Fauzi, 2011). Bands, lines and dividers also appear in Mambong pottery.

Stoneware, cookware, censer and earthen pot have only dividers and show no lines (horizontal lines). Pitcher and rounded pitcher (*geluk*) have lines and dividers. Stylistic attributes consist of elements, motifs, symmetry and structure (Rice, 1987). Principle design have 7 formulas; movement, harmony, unity, balance, proportion, variety and economy. The surface decoration can be analyzed by 7 principle of design, but not into depth, and can not lead into classification. In contrast, analysis design of pottery emphasize on three major approaches in pottery schools; design element analysis, symmetry analysis, and design structure analysis. Design element analyses attempt to isolate the individual elements of pottery design and explain their spatial occurrence in terms of the social behavior of the makers and users of the pottery (Rice, 1987). Symmetry analysis of ceramic decoration includes identifying and describing a design pattern. In order to describe the property of symmetry, the spatial position of geometrical figures and their movement across a line or around a point axis is considered (Shepard, 1976). The step is to determine the motion by which that part is repeated on the vessel. Symmetrical condition is achieved when a design is composed of repeated fundamental part. There are four kinds of movement which lead to define four classes of symmetry: translation, bilateral, rotation and slide reflection (Rice, 1987). Design structural analysis is interest in the structure or spatial arrangement of the designs on pottery or other decorated objects. The design components are referred to as elements and configuration and can be categorized as either primary or secondary. The result can be described into four features: definition of the area to be decorated, identification of the basic units of decoration, classification of the basic units, and identification of the rules (Hardin, 1983).

### ***Compare and Contrast***

Method of critically analyzing art work is to compare and contrast it to other work by the same artist to other artist's works or to works by other artists (Barrett, 2006). Study old Mambong pottery which are in Museum Kelantan compare and contrast with recent Mambong Pottery productions showing that the quality of recent Mambong Pottery is not good as the old Mambong (Siti Mariam, personal communication, July 8, 2014).

### ***Examine original and other country influences the styles***

Wray (1903) tried to prove that Malayan pottery which was made in the state of Perak without influence from more highly civilized nations. Traditional pottery in Malay was made with hand and not employed wheel method (Shamsu Mohamed, 2005). Most of the surface decorations from lines, point mole, curve line and fish bones are still reflects Malay culture (Tajul, Harozila, Fauzi, 2011). However, one of pitcher which was found 1982 and placed in Kelantan Museum show square spiral motif (*Pilin Segi empat*) in the decoration. This motif was probably influenced by Chinese motifs.

### **Historical context**

Historical context explained about historical moments, events, trends related to handicraft and how other interpreters have understood. Demographic of the potters and ceramic sociology approach should be discussed. For example, Mambong pottery have been made since 1868 at Mambong village that close to Galas River. Maimunah binti Puteh pioneered to make pottery and her fourth generations still produce Mambong pottery (Tajul, Harozila, Fauzi, 2011).

The use of wheel method is possible influenced by Chinese traders who brought ceramic to Semenanjung Island at 7 centuries (Azmi Arifin, Muhamad Luthfi, Tamiji, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

None of the research in Mambong pottery used standard descriptions or tried to make new standard descriptions. Further investigation should be carried out to make traditional pottery classification in Malaysia.

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