

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALAYSIAN AND JAPANESE POLITICAL POWER VIEWS THROUGH CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF SWORDS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the comparative views of the political strength of Malaysia and Japan based on the symbolism of cultural representation of keris and swords. Some elements are studied, including the East Asian regional order which focuses on the rise of One Belt One Road (OBOR) by China, the symbolism of keris and swords in political power and the uniqueness of such heritage based on aspects of science, technology and local culture. This qualitative study applied the Triangulation approach through interview methods and close reading techniques to obtain data and information from various sources to verify and endorse the interpretation of a fact. Based on the findings of this study, it is found that keris and swords play an important role in showcasing the symbolism of Malaysian and Japanese political strength. On the other hand, Malaysia and Japan are facing a resurgence of the One Belt One Road silk route initiated by the Republic of China. Therefore, Malaysia and Japan must be prepared to take advantage of the rapid pace of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 for a healthy competition and the stabilization of China influence, especially in the East Asian region.

Keywords: East Asian Order, rise of OBOR, Malaysia-Japan Politics, keris and swords symbolism

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INTRODUCTION

This study is funded by Sumitomo Foundation, Japan, which focuses on the comparative views of Malaysian and Japanese political strength through cultural representation of keris and swords. The elements studied are the East Asian regional order where the researcher analyzes the rise of One Belt One Road (OBOR) by the Republic of China, the symbolism of keris and

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swords in political power and the uniqueness of these weapons based on aspects of science, technology and local culture.

OBJECTIVE

There are three main objectives of this study. First, to study the symbolism of the sword and keris to attain the meaning and philosophy in the political aspect. Second, to analyze the East Asian regional order and its relation to the awareness of the rise of One Belt One Road (OBOR). The third objective is to study the scientific, technological and cultural aspects to evaluate the creativity and uniqueness of these creation of traditional Malaysian and Japanese weapons.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

It is hoped that this research paper can be a source of reference for researchers of literature and culture for both countries, i.e. Malaysia and Japan. This paper also proposes some recommendations for the preparation of Malaysia and Japan in facing the rise of OBOR and at the same time preserve their respective traditional weapons that are full of symbolism and historic elements. Finally, this study aims to respond to the recommendation of the Ministry of Higher Education to cultivate impressive academic writing and research activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A holistic study found a lack of research on the symbolism of keris and swords associated with aspects of politics, the Asian order as well as the rise of One Belt One Road (OBOR). Most studies were conducted based on the uniqueness of keris and swords by looking only at the aspects of design, history and manufacturing techniques.

For example, in Al-Mudra's study (2009) entitled *Melacak Asal-Usul Keris dan Peranannya dalam Sejarah Nusantara*. This study investigated the historical aspects of keris such as its origin and role in the development of history. The findings of the research found that in addition to being used for self-defense, keris also serves as a heroic symbol and it is also used as accessory by Malay community. This study is different from the researcher's study because it only touched on the history and origin of keris while the researcher's study focuses on the symbolism of political power between the keris and the sword.

On the other hand, a study conducted by Mohamad entitled *Keris: Perspektif Falsafah, Kejuruteraan dan Kemistikan* (2017) investigated the physical aspects of keris by analyzing the manufacturing material of such iconic weapon through metallurgical testing. Meanwhile, the non-physical aspect described matters related to the mysticism of keris. From the findings, it had been found that the results of metallurgical tests explained that the blade of the keris contains various materials or metal elements with varying forms of hardness. Various contents of the internal microstructure and the formation of foreign matter elements on the keris blades were analyzed. From the non-physical form, the study analyzed the aspects of mysticism practiced by the Malays, especially the practice of immunity. This study shared some similarities with the researcher's study. Both were doing research on the uniqueness of the keris but the aspect of symbolism in political power was not elaborated in the previous work.

Mohamad, Nik Hassan and Abdul Latif (2012) conducted a study entitled *Falsafah Perkerisan dalam Masyarakat Melayu*. In the study, the researchers explored the elements of manners and secrets in handling a keris. Based on the findings, it was found that the philosophy of the keris is related to the method of its manufacture with the origin of human creation. Human's creation is composed of four basic elements - earth, water, fire and wind. This has to do with the creation of a keris. Clearly, the study only focused on the technique of creation and the philosophy behind the creation of the keris. This contrasts with the researcher's study which examines in detail the symbolism, uniqueness and role of the keris and the katana sword in terms of politics of Malaysia and Japan.

On the other hand, from previous study entitled *From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-Militarism*, Berger (2007) focused on Japan's seemingly anti-military approach after World War II. This study is inclined towards Berger's assumptions and according to him, the political environment and economic security have showcased the anti-military trait of Japan. Berger's study borrowed the title 'From Sword to Chrysanthemum' based on the manifestation of Benedict Ruth's study in 1946. Researchers found that Berger's study focused more on Japanese administration and military policy after the Second World War and there was no further explanation of the sword element specifically. In contrast to the researcher's study, besides examining the symbolism of the sword and politics, the uniqueness of the sword itself is also taken into account.

In a study titled *The Swords of Japan: A Window of Modernization* conducted by Michael Hermen (2016), the role of swords and its relation to modernization in Japan were elaborated. Since Herman himself was once settled down in Japan, his understanding on the culture and lifestyle of the Japanese community. His research comprised of several sections such as the Feudal Samurai Era, Samurai Spirit, Meiji Era and Bushido as well as his contribution to the spirit of Japanese nationalism. To summarize, his study was more towards historical documentation and slightly different from the study of researchers which examines aspects of sword symbolism, political influence, the influence of OBOR and the uniqueness of the weapon manufacture.

Watabe (2021) in his study titled *Japanese Swords as Symbols of Historical Amnesia: Touken Ranbu and the Sword Boom in Popular Media* examined creative methods in resurrecting the greatness of swords in Japan through video games. It was found that the representation of swords is not only done through video games but Japan also utilizes popular media including anime, manga, TV, and movies in the campaign to raise the image of swords as symbolism that boosts people's sense of nationalism towards Japan. This study was quite interesting due to its element of entertainment. At the same time, it restored the memory of Japanese history and culture. Researchers found that this article can attract the attention of readers, especially young researchers to refer to and make it a new starting point for the sword era in Japan.

A study by Ethridge (2007) entitled *Reinventing the Sword: A cultural Comparison of the Development of the Sword in Response to the Advent of Firearms in Spain and Japan* touched on Samurai daggers and swords. Although this study clearly made a comparison between firearms in Spain and Japan, there are sub-topics that discussed on daggers around the archipelago. His study was quite thorough with pictures and detailed analysis. The study was not only focused on daggers and swords, but also involved other firearms such as pistols, rifles

and so on. In contrast, the researcher only refers and utilizes the data and information on the comparison of the dagger and the Samurai sword only to be used as support material for current study.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative. According to Holloway (1997), qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on human and logical ways of interpreting their experiences and surrounding. This is a natural step to understanding a situation based on its unique context and interaction.

This qualitative study applied the Triangulation approach through interview methods, close reading techniques and library/museum research. This study applied unstructured interviews because it is more flexible and the questions can be customized and changed depending on the respondent's answers.

Based on Fisher & Frey (2013), close reading is a strategy used to understand challenging text. The Triangulation approach involves a combination of various approaches to obtain data and information from various sources to verify and endorse the interpretation of a fact.

This study examined the comparison of the views of the political strength of Malaysia and Japan based on the symbolism of cultural representation of keris and swords. Some elements were analyzed including the East Asian regional order which focuses on the rise of One Belt One Road (OBOR) by China, the symbolism of keris and swords in political power and the uniqueness of such weapons based on aspects of science, technology and local culture. The following was the research framework applied:

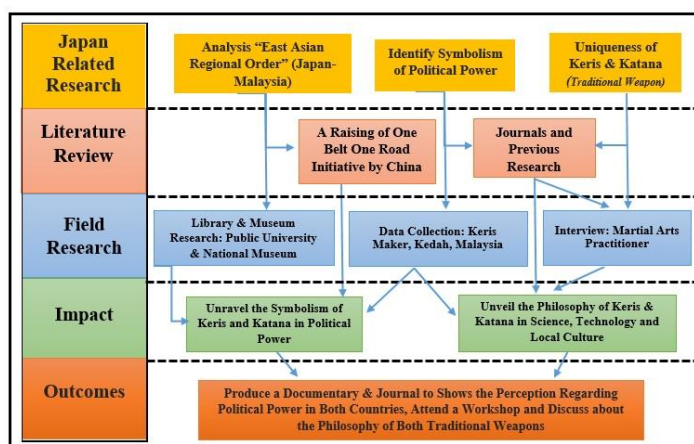


Figure 1. Framework of a comparative study of Malaysian and Japanese political strength views through sword cultural representation

Source: By the author

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of analysis based on elements of East Asian Regional Order through the rise of One Belt One Road (OBOR) by China, the symbolism of keris and swords in political power and the uniqueness of such iconic weapons based on local science, technology and culture.

Asian Regional Order and The Rise of One Belt One Road (Obor)

China's national strategy through the 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) mega project inspired by Xi Jinping in 2013 has evoked competition with other major powers such as the United States, Japan and Europe and captivated attention of various countries in the Asian region, especially Malaysia and around the archipelago to participate in this OBOR New Silk Road project. The thoughtful acceptance is not merely on the historical conviction of the Classical Maritime Silk Road, but is influenced by the aspiration to share expertise and technology from China, particularly in the field of Industrial Revolution 4.0.



Figure 2. The routes of One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and the geographical coverage of Malay Archipelago.

Source: Desenvolvindo Com

Nevertheless, the influx of Chinese capital through this OBOR cooperation has sparked concerns among some local and international leaders about the possibility of China's dominance in the Asian region, as well as around the world.

Japan-China

It is well known that Japan and China are countries with significant influence and economic power in the world, especially in Asia. This is due to their position considered as world superpowers.

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. Geographically, the OBOR route involves a road connecting the hinterland of China with Europe continent via Central Asia. Meanwhile, OBOR through the sea route connects the

entire region of Southeast Asia with the provinces of South China, that can also be accessed by railway and seaport.

Although OBOR plays an important role in national relations in Asia and the world, there are concerns from some leaders of neighboring countries. These concerns are related to disputes between China and several ASEAN countries involved with territorial claims in the south China sea and some other regions. In addition, Muhamad Azwan (2019) claims that the massive influx of China's investments through this OBOR cooperation has sparked anxiety among local leaders and other groups about the probability of China's domination.

It is found that Japan is very attentive in its effort to balance the influence of this OBOR. This can be seen especially in the project investments entrusted by Japan across ASEAN countries. Meanwhile, various efforts and diplomatic networks were undertaken by Japan to balance power through the Asia-Africa Corridor (AAGC) agreement with India. The AAGC was initiated by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016 during a visit to India. Japan seemed to be less interested in accepting the OBOR. According to Suresh (2019) the responses from Japan and India to the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) were not positive unlike many other Asian countries.

In August 2018, the Prime Minister of Japan went to China to discuss on Japan-China OBOR cooperation due to changes in international relations and the current situation. This policy change was believed to be due to the element of concern and interest based on Japanese national and geopolitical perspectives. However, this cooperation was accompanied by several conditions, namely openness, transparency, efficiency and a strong and stable financial position.

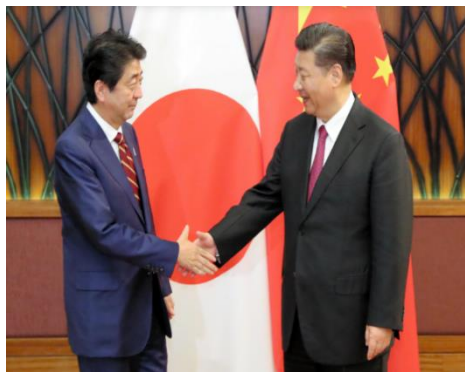


Figure 3. The Prime Minister of Japan went to China to discuss on Japan-China OBOR
Source: Japan Forward

This economic diplomacy approach was considered the main method by the Japanese government to navigate their country after the end of the World War. As a result, in just a decade, the Japanese economy was able to recover and has even able to be the main world economy to date.

Malaysia-China

The diplomatic ties between Malaysia and China have been established by former Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. This relation has become much stronger during the era of Tun Mahathir Mohamad, maintained by Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Abd Razak, especially since the coalition formed in the China Maritime New Silk Road project.



Figure 4. Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak and Xi Jinping posing for a photo during the Belt and Road Forum (BRF)

Source: Borneo Post

In the meantime, Xi Jinping himself visited Malaysia to elaborate on the same intention and goals. Symbolically, this meeting had showcased strong relationship between Malaysia and China. Based on the offer from this cooperation, Malaysia has given a positive response to the OBOR initiative in the effort to prosper the country's domestic and international economy development. According to Azrul and Sharifah (2017) in East Asia, few relationships have evolved as much as that between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. While important differences remain, relations have seen a marked improvement over the past decade, especially when compared to the considerable suspicion that once defined their relations.

Undoubtedly, this cooperation has sparked various interpretation, but the focus of the Malaysian government is to strengthen ties across politics and the economy. In fact, the substantial cooperation between the two countries in this new phase is expected to provide very positive economic growth especially for Malaysia and its impact on the implementation of technologies based on the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and regional development.

Mohd Saipuddin, Mimi Suriani and Xuan (2020) mention that the Maritime Silk Route which should not only be a medium of transportation and business, but also a logistics transfer of language, ideology and technology that contribute to the growth of the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

SYMBOLISM OF *KERIS* AND SWORDS IN POLITICAL POWER

Keris

Keris is one of the Malay artefacts with a remarkably long history. The initial purpose of its invention was as a self-defence weapon during the Malacca Empire, but its function has changed over time. According to Rifki Febriyan and Sri Mastuti (2019) *keris* is an art object inherited in the form of metal forging which is inherited to us as one of our identity *Keris* in its development is no longer a murder weapon, but has become a symbol of people's lives, or in other words as a reflection of the person and life.

Unfortunately, in current times, some have better-noted *keris* for its mystical elements, supernatural powers, as well as being heritage and valuable weapons. In fact, there are various philosophies in the making of *keris* applied by the inventors in crafting this superior weapon. However today, there are often misinterpretations and confusion in understanding the concept of *keris*.

Before diving further into the philosophy of *keris*' primacy, it is best to clearly understand the purpose of *keris*' invention that elevates its primacy in the Malay community's culture. Potentially influenced by the depiction of *Hang Jebat-Hang Tuah* in the *Sulalatus Salatin* script, *Keris* is not used for rampage as some people's perception, especially for the non-Malays. According to Mohamad and Nik Hassan (2013) there occurs misunderstanding and confusion in articulating the *keris* at present times with numerous misinterpretations of brandishing, kissing and lifting the *keris* upward pointing towards the sky.



Figure 5. Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, leader of UMNO Youth, kisses a *keris*, or a traditional Malay dagger, during the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) assembly in Kuala Lumpur
Source: Reuters

Fouzia Hassan (2019) further explains, there are some who viewed that the *keris* symbolises violence. Statements had to be made in assurance on the concerns about the *keris*, which had been a bone of contention among many non-Malays. Recent development of unease regarding the unsheathing of the wavy dagger, that was kissed to symbolise Malay sovereignty during the UMNO assembly ceremonies was misconstrued and the symbolism and significance of the *keris* had been misinterpreted by several quarters.

Based on an interview with a martial arts practitioner and *keris* collector Fairuz Azian, 2020 December 24, by personal communication [in-person interview], he had agreed that the symbolism of the invention of *keris* actually relates to some of the following elements:

- a) *Keris* holds the Malay community's dignity as well as symbolising the community's strength for generations;
- b) *Keris* is a symbol of Malay that supports sovereignty, power, and identity;
- c) *Keris* symbolises wisdom and knowledge. The *keris* users should be prudent, wise, and conversant in knowledge, not only in warriors and martial arts but also in religious, philosophical, and environmental knowledge;
- d) The symbolism of rising the *keris* means a person upholds the vested powers, sovereignty, and responsibility conferred upon him by a pledge to carry out his duties in a just and equitable manner in fulfilling his assigned trust;
- e) Kissing the *keris* is not only a symbolism of accepting power but with it comes with the accountabilities that are the willingness to humbly and fairly uphold the responsibilities, as well as the willingness to sacrifice for the country;
- f) Meanwhile, the symbolism of drawing the *keris* is the sense of loyalty to defend the religion, race, and nation, not only for the Malays but also defending the other races in this country;



Figure 6. An interview with a martial arts practitioner and *keris* collector Fairuz Azian, 2020 December 24, by personal communication [in-person interview]

Source: By the author

Based on the political aspect, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party has chosen the Malay *Keris* as a symbol of strength and protection to all communities just as the government that always protects their multiracial people. The sovereign Malay *Keris* is one of the symbols of strength and majesty in a leadership.

There is a view that the supremacy of *keris* will not be long-lasting if there are politicians involved in unhealthy practices such as corruption and abuse of power. This act would unquestionably tarnish the virtue of the *keris*, which should not happen and must be avoided. Without a doubt, the symbolism of *keris* used in political parties in Malaysia, especially UMNO, is not to intimidate other parties but rather to uplift the Malay culture. At the same

time, it upholds the customs and arts to display loyalty, dignity, and willingness to sacrifice in defending the country.

According to Agrestian, Deny Tri and Widyastuti (2019) keris, which originally functioned as weapons, now encountered a shift in function and meaning. Through the keris, it can be understood to what extent the level of culture, technology, social strata, politics, art, spiritual and religious understanding and other social joints.

Sword

Based on historical facts, Katana is a traditionally crafted Japanese sword. Katana was used during the feudal period in Japan, and it is commonly known as the Samurai sword. According to Hermen (2016) the Samurai warrior used to be defined by a high level of swordsmanship, spirituality, and discipline.

Physically, it has a smaller blade than other swords. This sword is usually gripped with both hands because of its long handle. According to research studies, it is found that the Katana sword has a very sharp blade because it is forged very prudently. Weins and Bleed (2011) point out that the curve in the blade can be attributed to the volumetric expansion of the untempered martensite on the cutting edge, which also causes the edge to be in a state of residual compression. The residual compressive stresses are one of the key elements of the Japanese sword which give it superior toughness and cutting ability.



Figure 7. Blade and mounting for a sword (Katana) blade, probably 19th century; mounting, 19th century

Source: The Met Fifth Avenue

The Katana was used in the past by Samurai warriors during their training and battles. Essentially, the use of Katana swords is widespread in various and well-known martial arts, such as Aikido, Ninjutsu, and Kendo. As the Katana's blade is razor-sharp, the Katana user should be highly disciplined in handling this sword to avoid any incidents. According to Agurruza (2014) the renown swordsmith Kunihiro Kawachi inscribed in the tang of a Katana “discipline your mind with this sword”.

In fact, Katana is not only famous in the Land of the Rising Sun but also around the world. It is undeniably recognised as an exceptionally sharp sword. Among the most renowned and respected Katana swords are Honjo Masamune and Kusanagi. Both swords are categorised as legendary swords. Nevertheless, the function of the sword has changed with time and situations. Kawashima et al. (2016) point out that Japan preserves different kinds of features from the past without destroying them. In addition to Kawashima et. al (2016), Suliyati (2013)

further explains, Japanese cultural values influence mindset in their life from the past until today.

Similar to Malaysia's political party, some Japanese political parties use the sword as a symbol of strength and unity of the people as the sword is believed to have made many contributions to the country in the past. A sword is seen as means to lift the people's spirit towards the love for their country. Meanwhile, the popularity of Japanese swords today has spread and become a transmedia symbol to attract the community's attention and further strengthen the identity of the Japanese for their land.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is viewed as the most active party in utilizing the sword and Samurai symbolism to serve as a source of attraction for their party. Grivas (2016) claims Japan and its culture are often expressed through certain stereotypes, the most impressive of which is the Samurai figure, the representative of Japan's warrior class.

For example, by using the Japanese swords when the Samurai popularity peaks among the younger generation, in around 2018, the members of the Democratic Liberal Party (LDP) had formed a group called the Watetsu (iron-Japanese) Group. Watetsu is a type of iron specially made for the creation of Japanese swords. The Watetsu Caucus group, made up of politicians, claimed that the efforts to preserve and promote the country's treasures needed to be fully supported. This act could prevent the culture of traditional sword creation art from disappearing. In addition to Grivas (2016), Manzenreiter (2015) further explains, culture of the sword is to date the most comprehensive and accessible history of Japanese swordsmanship in any language.



Figure 8. Facebook entry on the establishment of Watetsu Caucus by Yamada Hiroshi, a member of the House of Councillors

Source: Kohki Watabe

This endeavour is commendable and should be exemplary. However, some believe that politicians should also associate their identity with the majesty of the sword invention, not manipulating this element of art for their self-interest. Based on Watabe's (2021) observation, the aesthetic and symbolic value of the Japanese sword has been taken as the ideological vehicle of some politician.

On another note, despite the increasing use of sword symbols in the country's transmedia, this does not imply that the Land of the Rising Sun is making plans for the rebirth of the Japanese military conquest. Instead, this impression seeks to shape the spirit of nationalism among the community members. This is in line with the opinion of Watabe (2021)

mention that the sword has been mobilized in contemporary Japanese as a symbolic cultural commodity to enhance knowledge and consciousness of modern Japanese history.

Uniqueness of Keris Based on Science, Technology and Local Culture

For the Malay community, keris is one of the weapons that could result in fatalities if used during combat. Nevertheless, the stereotypical response that says keris is a murder weapon is not accurate at all. Undeniably, there is a part of the society today that views keris as a talisman with magical power, or a person's source of confidence. In reality, keris has high aesthetic and artistic values with exquisite craftsmanship and is considered greatly valuable. According to Mohamad et al. (2014) the keris is an illustrious weapon renowned for its capacity as an object of cultural heritage and priceless heirloom amongst the Malay people throughout the history of civilization.

Based on an interview with Fairuz Azian, 2020 December 24, for each invention of keris, there are three factors to consider: manners, secrets, and philosophy. The Malays are rich in philosophy, high in manners, and keep a thousand secrets. The fact is that the keris was not created with the intention of killing although it was indeed formerly used as a weapon. The values and philosophy of the invention of keris are related to the crafting techniques associated with the origins of human creation. The concept of human creation is based on four elements—land, water, fire, and wind. Men were created from the soil, softened with water, which was then worked with fire and then granted a soul.

The creators of the keris were inspired by this human creation and absorbed them into the technique of making keris. Besides, the method of making keris, such as the use of iron and nickel are taken from the ground and are then moulded with fire and water during the making process. This is followed by a prayer or spell recited by the creator of the keris, which is also known as the 'blacksmith' with a specific recitation that depends on the intention and wish of the person who requested the keris. According to Ethridge (2007) the Malay ironsmith of old was also a holy man of sorts. Similar to the Japanese tradition, his smithy was a consecrated place where he solemnly celebrated the ancient rites commemorating the gods' gifting of weapons to man before actually working on a keris.

Based on the uniqueness of the crafting method, the keris blade is indeed designed to make it easier to adapt to the user. The keris handle can be grasped using either the right or left hand. The trick is to place the user's thumb at the end of the keris handle. Therefore, keris is created with a user-friendly concept, whereby the blades could easily rotate to the left or right according to the situation. Also, the end of the keris could be removed where the keris blade could then be used as a lance or javelin blade. There is keris made of gold or yellow iron. Its uniqueness is as the keris blades are forged with gold or yellow iron, the keris has its physical stiffness and strength. It is believed that when the keris is stabbed onto opponents with an invincibility power, it could kill them.

On the other hand, the symmetrical blades created by a keris maker or blacksmith allow the keris to stand independently without any support because both sides of the blade have the same form. This symmetrical form stabilises the blades better when they are placed. Philosophically, this notion shows that keris is forged for strength, stability, justice, and impartiality. According to Mohamad, Nik Hassan & Abdul Latif (2012) the philosophy of Keris

is closely correlated to the creativity of the Empu in configuring the classification, structure, blade, anatomy and pamor patency of the Keris.

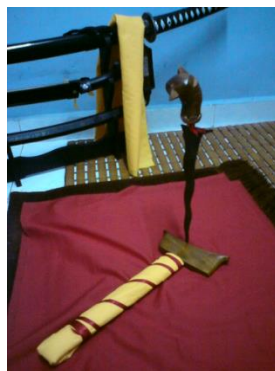


Figure 9. The symmetrical blades created by a keris maker or blacksmith allow the keris to stand independently
Source: Da'Khalifah

Through destructive testing-material composition tests carried out by previous researchers, the blades of the keris evidently contain various elements of metals. The metal elements detected in the making and forging of the keris include 21 elements, namely Aluminium (Al), Arsenic (As), Iron (Fe), Boron (B), Carbon (C), Chromium (Cr), Copper (Cu), Cobalt (Co), Lead (Pb), Manganese (Mn), Nickel (Ni), Molybdenum (Mo), Niobium (Nb), Phosphorus (P), Silicon (Si), Sulphur (S), Tin (Sn), Titanium (Ti), Tungsten (W) Vanadium (V), and Zirconium (Zr).

Each keris should have a systematic structure to ensure its strength and stability. This feature also applies to the keris blades. In achieving their strength and solidity, the keris maker or blacksmith forges the keris blades based on engineering principles while incorporating spiritual elements to acquire physical and spiritual strengths for the keris.

Although the keris is a weapon that can cause injury, all weapons are not keris as it is distinguished by the methods and material which has been used to create it. In the Malay civilaization, a keris is a special cultural artifact with a specific role (Al-Mudra, 2009).

The Uniqueness of Katana Swords is based on the Aspects of Science, Technology, and Local Culture

Swords have been known to be affiliated with the lives of Samurai. Even in Samurai philosophy, swords are Samurai spirits that must be respected and guarded with dignity. Katana, for a Samurai, is a spiritual value associated with moral height and depth of the soul and only used for critical moments such as defending dignity, honour, and self-esteem. According to Alexander (2012) from the earliest days in Japan, the sword was a symbol of political legitimacy, strength, righteousness, and morality, and was seen as an object of intense spiritual significance and beauty.

In terms of the production aspect, there is a philosophical similarity of the katana sword with the keris. A sword maker should consider the compatibility of the material elements and

the spirituality of the user. However, the making of a keris was heavily influenced by the Malay culture and Islamic teachings, whereas the making of the Katana sword aligns with Zen's teachings. It is believed that a sword created from the best material would not be meaningful if a Samurai lacks solace and inner peace control when using it.

There are two types of swords used by the Samurai, known as the long swords and the short swords. The purposes of these swords are very different: the long sword plays a role in attacking and defending from the enemy while the short sword serves its user to stab himself in the event where his honour and self-esteem are threatened or tarnished.

The Katana sword has a spirit and superior strength while providing important value as an artwork not only from the historical point of view but also of the perspective of its maker. Based on research by researchers, it was found that there are differences in raw materials and the process of the creation of Katana swords depends on the era and place of manufacturing. Katana swords in the modern era use a special iron called Tamahagane that is melted from iron dust and charcoal following the Tataru's traditional steelmaking system. It is produced based on manufacturing processes developed after the 17th to 19th century.



Figure 10. Traditional vs modern differential hardening for swords
Source: Butouken Martial Art Swords & Samoerai Zwaarden Informatie

Okayasu, Sakai & Tanaka (2015) further explains, Samurai swords are made using a traditional steelmaking technology, tataru, developed in ancient Japan. Steels made by tataru are called tamahagane. The sword is constructed by combining steel plates with different carbon contents in layers, with high-carbon steel being used to form the sharp cutting edge (the knife) and lowcarbon steels for the side planes and thick edge (the mandrel). The combined steel plates are repeatedly folded and stretched during hightemperature forging to produce the final shape of the sword.

Those are different from the ancient Katana sword made during the reign of Kamakura to Muromachi (12th-16th centuries). From the engineering aspect, the range of Martensite irons varies for each type of sword. For example, in the making of ancient Japanese swords, the Martensite used was only a few millimeters long, while for the making of modern Japanese swords, it is used extensively to a width of around 8mm. In addition, Matsumoto et al. (2020) mention that there are inclusions and residual materials that may be produced in the manufacturing processes of the modern Japanese sword, which cannot be confirmed with the ancient Japanese swords.

Katana's sword exerts a strong and significant influence on the life of a Samurai, in particular, in terms of how to use it, its rights, its method of making, the fame for its use, the superstition associated with it, the extraordinary value set, and the respect gained by the swordsman. According to McGurty (2014) the Samurai were regarded as a group of generally honest peoples who would give their word on anything. The Samurai lived to keep their honor and if such honor was lost, they would perform acts such as ritual death. One form of ritual death called seppuku involved the disembowelment of a Samurai, who wished to die with their honor.

All these elements combine and make Katana swords worthy of being recognised as swords of high value, extraordinaire, and pride. Thus, it is not surprising that some politicians are eager to use this image of symbolism to ensure the success of their political campaigns while creating awareness among the youth of the importance of preserving their country's traditional weapons through the symbolism of Katana's sword.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that there is a utilization of traditional weapons symbolism, which is the keris and Katana, in the political parties of these two countries. This is a fair attempt to ensure that the values and traditions of these two countries do not disappear with time. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the values and dignity of these two superior weapons should be cherished and not manipulated for merely political gains.

On another note, the Asian regional order related to the rise of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) by China should not be overlooked. Both Malaysia and Japan should optimally benefit from the aspects of Industrial Revolution 4.0 to receive the OBOR's personality with complete preparation and not be affected economically, socially, or politically.

Finally, through the uniqueness of keris and Katana, the government and educational institutions should better hoist the value of this art and cultural heritage so that today's technological advancement is in line with the cultural values and understanding of the local community. The Sumitomo Foundation's efforts in sponsoring this study are highly commendable and should be admired by others so that the sustainability of social science studies can continue to evolve and all knowledge can be shared and appreciated.

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