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# SYMBOLISM OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN MALAYSIAN AND CHINESE PEWTER CRAFT



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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF ART, SUSTAINABILITY AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the differences in design cultural elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts. The historical study aims to trace the evolution of the symbolism of cultural elements in utility product design from traditional Chinese pewter crafts to modern Malaysian pewter crafts, and to identify the factors that led the Malaysian pewter craft industry to achieve the popularity of traditional pewter crafts in the modern market. A total of 500 pewter craft products from 1990 to 2010 were collected, and only 40 were selected for comparison. The selection process ensures impartial consideration with no bias or personal influence. These considerations are aligned with research objectives, marketing segments, ethnic population rates, cultural types, and pewter product classifications. Analytical approach using iconographic narrative focuses on external elements such as form, pattern, structure, and material. Charles Sanders Peirce pursues symbolic analysis through his triad semiotic theory, which involves sensory relations, sign vehicles, and references. Behavioural semantics, pragmatics and syntax of Charles William Morris, and cultural semiotics are from Jørgen Dines Johansen and Svend Erik Larsen. The findings revealed differences in the design of pewter craft products between the two countries. The study also found the evolution of symbolism with the application of cultural elements in the design of modern Malaysian utility products made from pewter compared to Chinese pewter crafts. The factors behind the achievement, acceptance, and success of modern Malaysian pewter crafts are complex and comprehensive. This study gives benefits in understanding the concepts and methods of designs based on multicultural elements in the practice of pewter craft design in Malaysia. The process symbolises the evolution of similar design cultural elements between crafts from different cultural communities. This situation can be a catalyst for the public acceptance and healthy development of traditional crafts in the international market.





## **SIMBOLISME UNSUR BUDAYA DALAM KRAF PIUTER MALAYSIA DAN CHINA**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbezaan elemen budaya reka bentuk antara kerja kraf piuter Malaysia dan Cina. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menelusuri evolusi perlambangan elemen budaya dalam reka bentuk produk utiliti daripada kraf piuter tradisonal Cina kepada kraf piuter moden Malaysia. Selain itu, kajian ini mengenal pasti faktor-faktor industri kraf piuter tradisonal Malaysia mencapai kemahsyuran dalam pasaran moden. Sejumlah 500 produk kraf piuter dari 1990 hingga 2010 dikumpul, dan hanya 40 dipilih untuk perbandingan. Proses pemilihan memastikan pertimbangan dari segi kesaksamaan, tiada kecenderungan berpihak atau pengaruh peribadi. Pertimbangan ini diselaraskan dengan objektif penyelidikan, segmen pemasaran, kadar populasi etnik, jenis budaya dan klasifikasi produk piuter. Pendekatan analitikal menggunakan naratif ikonografi memberikan tumpuan kepada unsur luaran seperti bentuk, corak, struktur dan bahan. Analisis simbolik diusahakan melalui teori semiotik triad oleh Charles Sanders Peirce yang melibatkan hubungan deria, makna, tanda dan rujukan. Semantik tingkah laku, pragmatik dan sintaksis Charles William Morris, semiotik budaya adalah daripada Jorgen Dines Johansen dan Svend Erik Larsen. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat ciri-ciri perbezaan dalam reka bentuk produk kraf piuter berasaskan elemen budaya antara kedua-dua negara. Kajian turut menemukan evolusi perlambangan dengan penerapan elemen budaya dalam reka bentuk produk utiliti kraf piuter moden Malaysia berbanding kraf piuter Cina. Faktor-faktor di sebalik pencapaian, penerimaan dan kejayaan kraf piuter moden Malaysia adalah rumit dan menyeluruh. Dapatan kajian ini memberi faedah dalam memahami konsep dan kaedah reka bentuk berasaskan unsur pelbagai budaya dalam amalan reka bentuk kraf piuter di Malaysia. Proses ini melambangkan evolusi elemen budaya reka bentuk yang serupa antara kraf dari komuniti budaya yang berbeza. Keadaan ini boleh menjadi pemangkin kepada penerimaan masyarakat dan perkembangan sihat kraf tradisional di pasaran antarabangsa.



## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>DECLARATION OF THESIS</b>	ii
<b>DECLARATION OF THESIS</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	vi
<b>CONTENTS</b>	vii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	viii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	ix
<b>LIST OF PLATES</b>	x
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xi
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Research	9
1.3 Problem Statement	16
1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Research	20
1.5 Research Question	21

1.6 Limitations and Delimitations	23
1.6.1 Limitations of pewter works	24
1.6.2 Limitations of craftsmen/ corporations	26
1.6.3 Periodical Limitations	27
1.7 Significance of the Research	28
1.7.1 Implications of this thesis to traditional crafts	29
1.7.2 Contributions to the public institutions and society	30
1.7.3 Contributions to arts education	31
1.8 Research Methods and Procedures	31
1.9 Preliminary Conclusion	35

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1 Introduction	37
2.2 The Introduction of Related Concepts of Pewter Craftwork	38
2.2.1 Tin and Pewter	38
2.2.2 The Distribution of Tin and Pewter	40
2.2.3 Pewter Craftwork	43
2.2.4 The Traditional Way of Making Pewter Craftwork	45
2.3 The Introduction of Malaysian Modern Pewter Craftwork	50
2.4 The Introduction of Chinese Pewter Craftwork	59
2.5 Design Cultural Elements	67

2.6 The Gap of Research 68

2.7 Preliminary Conclusion 74

### **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

3.1 Introduction 76

3.2 Art, History and Contextualization 78

3.3 Erwin Panofsky and the Theory of Iconography 83

3.4 The Theory of the Semiotic Triangle 87

3.5 The Theory of the Cultural Semiotics 89

3.6 The Theory of the Behaviorist Symbolism 98

3.7 Determination of samples 100

3.8 Instrumentation 103

3.9 Research Design 109

### **CHAPTER 4 DESIGNING SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

4.1 Introduction 113

4.2 Sampling 115

4.2.1 List of Samples 116

4.2.2 List of Samples by Companies 149

4.2.3 Types of the Pewter Craftworks 156

4.2.4 Orientation of the Pewter Craftworks 160

4.2.5 Size of Works 163

4.2.6 Medium of Pewter Craftworks	167
4.3 Reconsideration of Selected Samples	168
4.4 The Specification of Final Selected Samples	169
4.5 The Sampling of Chinese Pewter Crafts	171

## **CHAPTER 5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

5.1 Introduction	218
5.2 Comparative Analysis	219
5.2.1 Comparative Analysis Attributes	220
5.2.2 A Comparative Summary and Conclusions	220
5.3 Certification Analysis Attributes	221
5.3.1 Certification Analysis Attributes	221
5.3.2 A Certification Summary and Conclusions	222
5.4 Comparative and Certification Analysis of Works	223

## **CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS**

6.1 Introduction	574
6.2 Findings	575
6.3 Summary	597



## **CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

7.1 Discussion	598
7.2 Implications	603
7.3 Recommendations and Conclusions	606
<b>REFERENCE</b>	<b>608</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Tables No.</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.1 The research problems, questions and aims in the studies	23
3.1 The List of Record by Telephone and Online Interview	108
4.1 The Complete List of Collected Images of MMPC	117
4.2 Undetectable pewter artifacts	147
4.3 Position, Number and Percentage of Research Sample	149
4.4 The Complete List of Selected Works of Metal Sculptures	150
4.5 The Complete list of selected Artifacts of the Main Malaysian pewter	155
4.6 Companies: Celebrations/occasions, Living	156
4.7 Companies: Achievements/Appreciation, Baby Showers/Christenings	157
4.8 Companies: Figurines, Chess, Home Accessories, Desk Accessories	158
4.9 Companies: Drink ware, Tableware, Coffee/Tea of the selected artifacts	158
4.10 Companies: Music Boxes/Carousels, Child's Mugs, Photo frames	159
4.11 Companies: Staff Awards, VIP Gifts, Appreciation Gifts, Door Gifts	159
4.12 Companies: Others pewter artifacts of the selected artifacts	160
4.13 Companies: Representational or figurative pewter artifacts	160
4.14 Companies: The selected craftworks of different nations or countries	161



4.15	Companies: Religious pewter artifacts of the selected artifacts	162
4.16	Companies: Biomorphic pewter artifacts of the selected artifacts	162
4.17	The Difference Scale of Dimensions	164
4.18	The Dimension of Pewter Craftwork	164
4.19	The Difference Scale of Dimensions	167
4.20	The Distribution of the Usage of Medium of Pewter Artifacts	168
4.21	The composition of Final Orientation of Selected Samples	170
4.22	the table shows the main production provinces in China	171
4.23	The Difference Scale of Chinese pewter crafts dimensions	172
4.24	The Distribution of the Usage of Medium	173
4.25	The Complete List of Final Selected Samples Ranking	174
4.26	The Complete List of Final Selected Chinese Pewter	177
5.1	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' pumpkin images	236
5.2	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' pumpkin images	250
5.3	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' word and seal images	265
5.4	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' Five elements images	278
5.5	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' jars images	291
5.6	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' zodiac animal images	306
5.7	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' fish images	320
5.8	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' writing tools images	334
5.9	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' four gentlemen images	349
5.10	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' food box images	363





5.11	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' dragon images	376
5.12	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' knot images	389
5.13	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' chimes images	402
5.14	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' landscape images	416
5.15	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' gold inlaid with jade	430
5.16	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' Confucius images	445
5.17	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' word Fu images	460
5.18	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' cultural	474
5.19	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' Yue Qin images	488
5.20	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' five blessing images	502
5.21	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries' Yue Qin images	516
5.22	A behavior semiotic comparison two countries	529
6.1	The differences of design cultural elements in two countries	579



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figures No.</b>		<b>Page</b>
1.1	The origin of the research problems about Malaysian pewter crafts	18
1.2	Limitation of the pewter crafts	25
1.3	The whole frame methodology in the Thesis	35
2.1	The flow chart of traditional making pewter craftworks	47
2.2	The research stance from author designed	72
3.1	A Connection of Artifacts Form as an Object, Subject	82
3.2	The Theory of Iconology by Panofsky	85
3.3	The semiotic triangle of Charles Sanders Peirce	88
3.4	The extension of the semiotic triangle	88
3.5	Research Design for a Cultural Feature Research	110
3.6	Contextual Analytical Framework	111
3.7	Comparative Analysis Frameworks	117
4.1	Calculation for the Size of Artifacts and 3-Dimensional Volume	163
5.1	The symbolization process between two countries	226

5.2	The change of pumpkin images in time and space	227
5.3	The time and space change of pumpkin in two pewter crafts	228
5.4	The change of pumpkin images in body and subject	230
5.5	The shape change of pumpkin image in two pewter crafts	233
5.6	The change of pumpkin images in action model	234
5.7	The action and action model change of pumpkin image	235
5.8	The semiotic change of pumpkin images in two countries	237
5.9	The symbolization process between two countries	240
5.10	The change of Gu images in time and space	241
5.11	The time and space change of Gu in two pewter crafts	243
5.12	The change of Gu images in body and subject	243
5.13	The shape change of Gu image in two pewter crafts	247
5.14	The change of Gu images in action model	248
5.15	The action and action model change of Gu image	249
5.16	The semiotic change of Gu images in two countries	251
5.17	The symbolization process between two countries	254
5.18	The change of character and seal images in time and space	255
5.19	The time and space change of character and seal	258
5.20	The change of character and seal images in body and subject	258
5.21	The change of character and seal images in action model	263

5.22	The action and action model change of character	264
5.23	The semiotic change of words and seal images	266
5.24	The common five elements images from two countries	269
5.25	The symbolization process between two countries	269
5.26	The change of five elements images in time and space	270
5.27	The time and space change of five elements in two pewter crafts	271
5.28	The change of five elements images in body and subject	272
5.29	The shape change of five elements images in two pewter crafts	274
5.30	The change of five elements images in action model	275
5.31	The action and action model change of five elements images	277
5.32	The semiotic change of five elements images in two countries	279
5.33	The common traditional jars image from two countries	281
5.34	The symbolization process between two countries' jars images	282
5.35	The change of traditional jars images in time and space	283
5.36	The time and space change of traditional jars	285
5.37	The change of traditional jars images in body and subject	285
5.38	The shape change of traditional jars image in two pewter crafts	289
5.39	The change of traditional jar images in action model	289
5.40	The action and action model change of traditional jars image	290
5.41	The semiotic change of traditional jars images	292

5.42	The common one of the Zodiac images from two countries	294
5.43	The symbolization process between two countries	296
5.44	The change of twelve Chinese Zodiac animal images	297
5.45	The time and space change of Zodiac in two pewter crafts	298
5.46	The change of twelve Chinese Zodiac animal images in body	299
5.47	The shape change of Zodiac image in two pewter crafts	302
5.48	The change of twelve Chinese Zodiac animal image	303
5.49	The action and action model change of Zodiac image	305
5.50	The semiotic change of Zodiac images in two countries	307
5.51	The common fish image from two countries' pewter crafts	310
5.52	The symbolization process between two countries' fish images	311
5.53	The change of fish images in time and space	312
5.54	The time and space change of fish images in two pewter crafts	313
5.55	The change of fish images in body and subject	314
5.56	The shape change of fish images in two pewter crafts	317
5.57	The change of fish images in action model	317
5.58	The action and action model change of fish images	319
5.59	The semiotic change of fish images in two countries' pewter crafts	321
5.60	The common Chinese writing tools from two countries' crafts	324
5.61	The symbolization process between two countries' pumpkin images	324

5.62	The change of Chinese writing tools in time and space	325
5.63	The time and space change of Chinese writing tools	328
5.64	The change of Chinese writing tools in body and subject	329
5.65	The shape change of Chinese writing tools image	331
5.66	The change of Chinese writing tools in action model	332
5.67	The action and action model change of Chinese writing tools	333
5.68	The semiotic change of Chinese writing tools images	335
5.69	The common four gentlemen images from two countries' crafts	339
5.70	The symbolization process between two countries	339
5.71	The change of four gentlemen images in time and space	340
5.72	The time and space change of gentlemen in two pewter crafts	342
5.73	The change of four gentlemen images in body and subject	343
5.74	The shape change of gentlemen image in two pewter crafts	346
5.75	The change of four gentlemen images in action model	346
5.76	The action and action model change of gentlemen image	348
5.77	The semiotic change of gentlemen images in two countries	350
5.78	The common traditional food box image	353
5.79	The symbolization process between two countries	353
5.80	The change of traditional food box images in time and space	354
5.81	The time and space change of food box in two pewter crafts	356

5.82	The change of traditional food box images in body and subject	357
5.83	The shape change of food box image in two pewter crafts	359
5.84	The change of traditional food box images in action model	360
5.85	The action and action model change of food box image	361
5.86	The semiotic change of food box images	364
5.87	The common dragon image from two countries' pots	366
5.88	The symbolization process between two countries' dragon images	367
5.89	The change of dragon images in time and space	368
5.90	The time and space change of dragons in two pewter crafts	370
5.91	The change of dragon images in body and subject	371
5.92	The shape change of dragon images image in two pewter crafts	373
5.93	The change of dragon images in action model	374
5.94	The action and action model change of dragon images	375
5.95	The semiotic change of dragon images in two countries	377
5.96	The common knotting image from two countries' teapots	380
5.97	The symbolization process between two countries	380
5.98	The change of knotting images in time and space	381
5.99	The time and space change of knotting images	383
5.100	The change of knotting images in body and subject	384
5.101	The shape change of knotting images image in two pewter crafts	387

5.102	The change of knot images in action model	387
5.103	The action and action model change of knotting images image	388
5.104	The semiotic change of knotting images	390
5.105	The common chimes image from two countries' crafts	392
5.106	The symbolization process between two countries	393
5.107	The change of chimes images in time and space	394
5.108	The time and space change of chimes image in two pewter crafts	395
5.109	The change of chimes images in body and subject	396
5.110	The shape change of chimes image in two pewter crafts	399
5.111	The change of chimes images in action model	399
5.112	The action and action model change of chimes image	401
5.113	The semiotic change of chimes image in two countries	403
5.114	The common landscape image from two countries' teapots	405
5.115	The symbolization process between two countries	406
5.116	The change of landscape images in time and space	407
5.117	The time and space change of landscape in two pewter crafts	408
5.118	The change of landscape images in body and subject	409
5.119	The shape change of landscape images in two pewter crafts	413
5.120	The change of landscape images in action model	413
5.121	The action and action model change of landscape images	415

5.122	The semiotic change of landscape images in two countries	417
5.123	The common gold inlaid with jade image from two countries	419
5.124	The symbolization process between two countries	420
5.125	The change of gold inlaid with jade images in time and space	421
5.126	The time and space change of gold inlaid with jade images	423
5.127	The change of gold inlaid with jade images in body and subject	423
5.128	The shape change of gold inlaid with jade images	427
5.129	The change of gold inlaid with jade images in action model	428
5.130	The action and action model change of gold inlaid with jade	429
5.131	The semiotic change of gold inlaid with jade images	431
5.132	The common Confucius image from two countries' crafts	434
5.133	The symbolization process between two countries	435
5.134	The change of Confucius images in time and space	436
5.135	The time and space change of Confucius in two pewter crafts	438
5.136	The change of Confucius images in body and subject	438
5.137	The shape change of Confucius images in two pewter crafts	441
5.138	The change of Confucius images in action model	442
5.139	The action and action model change of Confucius	443
5.140	The semiotic change of Confucius images in two countries	446
5.141	The common word Fu image from two countries' crafts	449

5.142	The symbolization process between two countries	449
5.143	The change of word Fu images in time and space	450
5.144	The time and space change of word Fu in two pewter crafts	452
5.145	The change of word Fu images in body and subject	453
5.146	The shape change of word Fu in two pewter crafts	456
5.147	The change of word Fu images in action model	457
5.148	The action and action model change of word Fu	458
5.149	The semiotic change of word Fu images in two countries	461
5.150	The common a horse treading a swallow image	463
5.151	The symbolization process between two countries	464
5.152	The change of a horse treading a swallow images	465
5.153	The time and space change of a horse treading a swallow	466
5.154	The change of a horse treading a swallow images	467
5.155	The shapes change of a horse treading a swallow	471
5.156	The change of a horse treading a swallow images in action model	472
5.157	The action and action model change of a horse treading a swallow	473
5.158	The semiotic change of cultural images in two countries	475
5.159	The common a horse treading image from two countries' crafts	478
5.160	The symbolization process between two countries	479
5.161	The change of Yue Qin images in time and space	480

5.162	The time and space change of Yue Qin in two pewter crafts	481
5.163	The change of Yue Qin images in body and subject	482
5.164	The shape change of Yue Qin image in two pewter crafts	485
5.165:	The change of Yue Qin images in action model	486
5.166	The action and action model change of Yue Qin image	487
5.167	The semiotic change of Yue Qin images in two countries	489
5.168	The common five blessing image from two countries' crafts	492
5.169	The change of five blessing images in time and space	493
5.170	The time and space change of five blessings in two pewter crafts	495
5.171	The change of five blessing images in body and subject	496
5.172	The shape change of five blessing image in two pewter crafts	499
5.173	The change of five blessing images in action model	499
5.174	The action and action model change of five blessing image	501
5.175	The semiotic change of five blessing images in two countries	503
5.176	The common Chinese box image from two countries' crafts	505
5.177	The symbolization process between two countries	506
5.178	The change of Chinese box images in time and space	507
5.179	The time and space change of Chinese box in two pewter crafts	509
5.180	The change of Chinese box images in body and subject	510
5.181	The shape change of Chinese box image in two pewter crafts	513

5.182	The change of Chinese box images in action model	513
5.183	The action and action model change of Chinese box image	515
5.184	The semiotic change of Chinese box images in two countries	517
5.185	The common auspicious patterns image from two countries	519
5.186	The symbolization process between two countries	520
5.187	The change of auspicious patterns images in time and space	521
5.188	The time and space change of auspicious patterns	522
5.189	The change of auspicious patterns images in body and subject	523
5.190	The shape change of auspicious patterns image	526
5.191	The change of auspicious patterns images in action model	527
5.192	The action and action model change of auspicious patterns image	528
5.193	The semiotic change of auspicious patterns images	530
5.194	The common Yin and Yang image from two countries' crafts	532
5.195	The common Gu Qin image from two countries' crafts	536
5.196	The common Yu Huang image from two countries' crafts	539
5.197	The common connotation of having many children	543
5.198	The common crane image from two countries' crafts	546
5.199	The common dragon image from two countries' crafts	549
5.200	The common traditional basket image from two countries' crafts	552
5.201	The common food box image from two countries' crafts	555



5.202	Forms: The Statue of Buddha Shakyamuni	564
6.1	The re-symbolization process of design cultural elements	582
6.2	Change the cultural time and space	583
6.3	Change the cultural subject or body	584
6.4	Change the cultural action model	585
6.5	The methods of revival Malaysian traditional pewter crafts	588
7.1	The research is benefit to modern markets	600
7.2	The research is benefit to understand cultural elements	602
7.3	The research is benefit to other traditional crafts	605



## LIST OF PLATES

Plates No.	Page
1.1 Multicultural elements in Malaysian modern pewter craftwork	14
1.2 The comparison between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts	15
2.1 The distribution map of tin ore resources in the world	40
2.2 The distribution map of tin resources in Malaysia	42
2.3 The route Chinese tinsmiths came to Malaysia in 19th century	38
2.4 The shop Chinese tinsmiths started in Malaysia 19th century	39
2.5 Royal Selangor pewter icons at different times	44
4.1 Five Different Views of Sample No.1	178
4.2 Existing Views of Sample No 2	179
4.3 Five Different Views of Sample No.3	180
4.4 Five Different Views of Sample No 4	181
4.5 Five Different Views of Sample No 5	182
4.6 Five Different Views of Sample No 6	183
4.7 Five Different Views of Sample No 7	184
4.8 Five Different Views of Sample No 8	185
4.9 Five Different Views of Sample No 9	186



4.10	Five Different Views of Sample No 10	187
4.11	Existing Views of Sample No 11	188
4.12	Five Different Views of Sample No 12	189
4.13	Existing Views of Sample No 13	190
4.14	Three Different Views of Sample No 14	191
4.15	Three Different Views of Sample No 15	192
4.16	Five Different Views of Sample No 16	193
4.17	Five Different Views of Sample No 17	194
4.18	Existing Views of Sample No 18	195
4.19	Existing Views of Sample No 29	196
4.20	Five Different Views of Sample No 20	197
4.21	Three Different Views of Sample No 21	198
4.22	Five Different Views of Sample No 22	199
4.23	Five Different Views of Sample No 23	200
4.24	Existing Views of Sample No 24	201
4.25	Five Different Views of Sample No 25	202
4.26	Existing Views of Sample No 26	203
4.27	Existing Views of Sample No 27	204
4.28	Existing Views of Sample No 28	205
4.29	Existing Views of Sample No 29	206
4.30	Three Views of Sample No 30	207
4.31	Five Different Views of Sample No 31	208





4.32	Existing Different Views of Sample No 32	209
4.33	Six Different Views of Sample No 33	210
4.34	Five Different Views of Sample No34	211
4.35	Three Different Views of Sample No 35	212
4.36	Three Different Views of Sample No 36	213
4.37	Existing Different Views of Sample No 37	214
4.38	Existing Different Views of Sample No 38	215
4.39	Existing Different Views of Sample No 39	216
4.40	Existing Different Views of Sample No 40	217
5.1	A Malaysian melon pewter teapot	224
5.2	A Chinese melon pewter teapot	225
5.3	The common pumpkin image from two countries' teapots	225
5.4	The pumpkin crafts in Chinese dynasties	228
5.5	The Chinese pumpkin teapots in different materials	230
5.6	The pumpkin images in Chinese crafts and arts	231
5.7	The pumpkin images in Malaysian and Western cultural crafts	232
5.8	Malaysian pewter vase	238
5.9	A Chinese pewter Gu	239
5.10	The common Gu image from two countries' teapots	239
5.11	The pumpkin crafts in Chinese dynasties	242
5.12	The Chinese traditional Gu in different materials	244
5.13	The traditional vase shapes in Malaysian and Greek crafts	245



5.14	The Gu images in Chinese crafts and arts	246
5.15	Malaysian seal pewter teapot	252
5.16	Chinese traditional pewter teapot	253
5.17	The common character and seal image from two countries' teapots	253
5.18	The character styles in Chinese dynasties	257
5.19	The Chinese traditional seal calligraphic styles	259
5.20	The seal images in Chinese crafts and arts	261
5.21	The word and seal images in local crafts and arts	261
5.22	The shape change of character and seal image in two pewter crafts	263
5.23	Malaysian Five Elements Teapot	267
5.24	Chinese traditional pewter mirror	268
5.25	The patterns on the local modern pewter crafts	273
5.26	A relationship illustration of Chinese five elements theory	276
5.27	A Malaysian pewter jar	280
5.28	A Chinese pewter jar	281
5.29	The Different Chinese jars	284
5.30	Chinese traditional clothing and outline of Chinese traditional hat	286
5.31	The traditional hat images in Chinese crafts and arts	287
5.32	The traditional hat images in Chinese crafts and arts	288
5.33	A Malaysian trinket box	293
5.34	One Chinese Zodiac Cup	294
5.35	The Zodiac animal images in Malaysian pewter boxes	295



5.36	The different materials of Chinese Zodiac animal	300
5.37	The abstractive style of the local crafts and arts	301
5.38	Malaysian pewter fish decanter	308
5.39	Chinese pewter fish figurine	309
5.40	Different art forms of fishes in China	314
5.41	The fish crafts in local markets	316
5.42	Malaysian pewter Shaving set	322
5.43	A Chinese pewter ink box	323
5.44	Chinese traditional writing brushes in dynasties	327
5.45	The writing tools of Islamic calligraphy	327
5.46	The Chinese traditional writing tools	329
5.47	The shaving tools of the local markets	331
5.48	A Malaysian pewter vase	337
5.49	A Chinese pewter pot	338
5.50	The Chinese four gentlemen in different art forms and materials	343
5.51	The plant images in local crafts and arts	345
5.52	A Malaysian pewter teapot	351
5.53	A Chinese pewter food box	352
5.54	The Chinese traditional food boxes	355
5.55	Chinese traditional food boxes are in different materials and forms	357
5.56	The traditional handicraft boxes in Malaysia	359
5.57	Malaysian pewter caddy	365



5.58	Chinese pewter canister	366
5.59	The dragon images are in different dynasties of China history	369
5.60	The various dragon images are in Chinese craftworks	371
5.61	The different dragon images are in local craftworks	372
5.62	A Malaysian pewter tumbler	378
5.63	A Chinese pewter pot	379
5.64	The images of ropes and knots in Chinese history	382
5.65	The Chinese knots images in different materials	384
5.66	The different weaving works are in local traditional handicrafts	386
5.67	Malaysian pewter memo holder	391
5.68	A group of Chinese traditional bronze chimes	392
5.69	The whole set of Zeng Hou yi chimes image	396
5.70	The different Chime works are in local traditional handicrafts	398
5.71	Malaysian pewter teapot	404
5.72	Chinese pewter teapot	405
5.73	The Chinese landscape ink paintings in dynasties	410
5.74	The Chinese landscape ink paintings in dynasties	412
5.75	A Malaysian pewter teapot	418
5.76	A Chinese pewter teapot	419
5.77	The different gold inlaid with jade crafts in China	424
5.78	The different gold inlaid with jade crafts in Malaysia	426
5.79	Malaysian pewter statuette	432



5.80	Chinese pewter figurine	433
5.81	The Confucius portrait shows in Chinese dynasties	439
5.82	The different cultural figurines of the local pewter crafts	440
5.83	Malaysian pewter plaque	447
5.84	Chinese pewter tray	448
5.85	The Confucius portrait shows in Chinese dynasties	451
5.86	The word Fu image is in different forms and materials	454
5.87	The local pewter plate decorated with rich characters and patterns	455
5.88	Malaysian pewter memo holder	462
5.89	A Chinese pewter craft	462
5.90	A horse treading a swallow images in different forms	468
5.91	The rich cultural icons shown in the local pewter crafts	470
5.92	Malaysian pewter card holder	476
5.93	A Chinese pewter crafts	477
5.94	The different styles of traditional Yue Qin images	482
5.95	The music instruments shapes of the local pewter crafts	484
5.96	Malaysian pewter pot	490
5.97	A Chinese pewter pot	491
5.98	The different styles of traditional five blessing images	496
5.99	The Five blessing patterns related of the local handicrafts	498
5.100	Malaysian pewter box	504
5.101	Chinese pewter box	504





5.102	The different styles of traditional Chinese box images	510
5.103	The pewter boxes of the local pewter companies	512
5.104	Malaysian pewter caddy	518
5.105	Chinese pewter caddy	519
5.106	The different styles of traditional auspicious patterns images	524
5.107	The rich auspicious decorative patterns are in the local	525
5.108	Malaysian pewter pen holder	531
5.109	Chinese pewter writing-brush washer	532
5.110	Malaysian pewter opener	535
5.111	Chinese pewter crafts	536
5.112	Malaysian pewter stand	538
5.113	Chinese pewter crafts	539
5.114	Malaysian pewter tray	541
5.115	Chinese pewter ornament	542
5.116	Malaysian pewter caddy	545
5.117	Chinese pewter crafts	546
5.118	Malaysian pewter tea set	548
5.119	Chinese pewter crafts	549
5.120	Malaysian pewter teapot	551
5.121	Chinese pewter crafts	552
5.122	Malaysian pewter coffee set	554
5.123	Chinese pewter food box	555





5.124	A Malaysian pewter	558
5.125	The pattern of traditional Batik textile in Southeast Asia	559
5.126	A Malaysian Oil Diffuser	560
5.127	Two traditional oil diffusers in India	561
5.128	A Malaysian tea pewter caddy	562
5.129	A Malaysian pewter dish	563
5.130	A Malaysian a pewter plaque	565
5.131	A series of characters in Ramayana	566
5.132	A Malaysian pewter wine funnel	566
5.133	The image of wine god in Greek culture	567
5.134	A Malaysian pewter jug	568
5.135	The Statue of Ganesha in India	569
5.136	A Malaysian pewter box	570
5.137	A Malaysian pewter clock	571
5.138	A Malaysian pewter plate	572





## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAV	Cultural Additional Value
CPC	Chinese Pewter Craftwork
CTPC	Chinese Traditional Pewter Craft
EAMD	Euro-American Modern Designs
IA	Iconographic Analysis
MMN	Modern Market Needs
MMPC	Malaysian Modern Pewter Craftwork
MPC	Malaysian Pewter Craft
SA	Semiotic Analysis
TC	Traditional Craftwork





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

In the history of world in use of pewter goes back to ancient times and the oldest piece of pewter on record is the pilgrim's bottle of Abydos in Egypt, which dates back to about 1500BC. However, it was only around the 14<sup>th</sup> century that pewter became widely used at the Western dining table. In 1348AD, English pewter set up a guild, which later decreed that every pewter should "set his mark" on each piece he produced. (Vanessa Brett, 1981) In Asia, pewter was first used in China, more than 2,000 years ago; afterwards, it is distributed to Malaysia about 19<sup>th</sup> century AD by a Chinese family, traditional pewter arts was rooted and flourished in modern Malaysia, and became one cultural representation of this country, glowing light to the world for civilization and wisdom. (Chen May Yee, 2002)



Modern Period (about 1800–Present): Beginning around the 19th century, this period includes significant events like the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and the rise of nation-states. It is characterized by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and political upheavals that have shaped contemporary societies. (Wikipedia, 2024) So, “Malaysian modern pewter crafts (MMPC)” is used to refer to the products of Malaysian pewter companies in modern time.

The protection of traditional crafts represents one of the goals of intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded, as defined in the UNESCO 2003 Convention. In the field of metal artifacts, traditional pewter is embodied in modern Malaysian society which is a various races and many languages’ country. The traditional pewter and artistic value of the historic objects means protection of their intangible aspect which is to be kept and nurtured for future generations.

“Malaysia National Heritage Act (Sharmani Patricia Gabriel 2020) on the other hand defines heritage item as any National Heritage, Heritage site, Heritage object or Underwater Cultural Heritage as listed in the register of the act. The Malaysian National Heritage Act 2005 is an act to provide for the conservation and preservation of national heritage, natural heritage, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, underwater cultural heritage, treasure trove and for related matters. It received royal assent on 30 December 2005 and was published in the gazette on 31 December 2005. The National Heritage Act came into effect on 1 March 2006. Other classification of Heritage includes Tangible and Intangible Heritage.”(William van der Heide 2002)

Malaysia is a diverse and naturally rich country. Located in South-East Asia and renowned for its biodiversity, it contains a variety of resources. Tin is found in



Malaysia in the “Western Tin Belt”, stretching along peninsular Malaysia through the Kinta and Klang valleys. It is estimated that these rocks are between 1300 and 1700 BC, the crust being Phanerozoic. It is deposited within alluvium, which is a deposit of sand, silt, clay and gravel by rivers usually in floodplain areas. Malaysia used to be one of the main exporters of tin; in fact in 1979 Malaysia’s tin exports accounted for 31% of the total global tin output. (Sophiejoynrm, 2016) Tin has contributed largely to Malaysia’s economy, and was also behind the establishment of Kuala Lumpur by Chinese workers searching for the metal.

Taking the Malaysian Royal Selangor pewter enterprise for example, the company is the biggest and has a longest history in Malaysia. The creator of Royal Selangor was a Chinese family; the family’s predecessors came to Selangor in Malaysia from a village of Shantou city, Guangdong province of China in 1885. Initially, it is only a cottage industry, weathered two world wars, transformed gradually into a modern company. Its pewter products expanded from initial ceremonial vessels to an eclectic range of pewter creations that was sold in twenty-six countries and won many international design awards. (Chen May Yee, 2002) For examples, the company designed the products with pewter shims, or corners, that were both decorative and served to hold the wooden parts together, won a New and Improved Product Development Award (Federal Department of Information 1982) from the federation of Malaysian Manufacturers in 1983. The products of Sovereign Collection won a New and Improved Product Development Award from the federation of Malaysian





Manufacturers in 1983. The products won a Gold Metal in the Excellence in Quality and Design Category at the Leipzig international Fair in Germany in 1984. The tableware products won a Design Plus Award at the Frankfurt international Gift Fair in 1989 and a hipflask won a Design Plus Award in 1991. A tankard product won second place in the Manufacture/Professional Category of the American Pewter Guild Design Competition in 1994. The wine accessories products won the Gift of the Year Award in the Licensed Gifts Category from the Giftware Association of the United Kingdom in 1997. The wine funnel garnered a "red dot" award (Peter Zec 2006) for product design from the North Rhine-Westphalia Design Centre in Essen, Germany, a bronze industrial Design Excellence Award in the consumer products category from the Industrial Designers Society of America, and a G-Mark Good Design Award from the Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organization.

The Royal Selangor enterprise has come a long way from its beginnings in a little shop house on Cross Street to an international big enterprise which provided various new designs each year at international gift fairs and sold in 26 countries through the company's own shops and major retailers. This pewter crafts company had about 70 employees in 1962, Selangor Pewter's first foreign market was predictably Singapore in 1968, became a larger factory in Setapak with 300 employees 1977, the company was conferred a royal warrant on Selangor Pewter, renamed Royal Selangor international Sdn Bhd.r in 1979. The company acquired Englefields, the 300-year-old London maker of Crown & Rose pewter. Englefields has now been renamed Royal





Selangor UK in 1987. Royal Selangor acquired the London silver company Comyns, along with some 350 historic silver designs dating back to the 17th century. The company acquired Seagull Pewter, Canada's biggest pewtermaker, to further tap the North American market. (Chen May Yee, 2002)

So, as a result of above those successes and other benefits of geography and climate and society, Malaysian modern pewter craftwork (MMPC) (Paul W. Beamish 2000) faced a prospective development which everyone had been knowing it in the modern (Caroline Beechener 2003) world, comparison with other countries which are China, Japan, British, American et cetera, there have a serious degeneration of traditional pewter craft in China that are main original areas of tin wares.



In china, tin wares come from a long time before Xia dynasty to be his summit in Qing dynasty for popularity and intellectual praising highly; after Qing dynasty, society was in upheaval in this time, it is impossible for people to buy tin wares due to being in hungry whole day; until to the last century 1950s and 1960s, one good pewter's price more than a worker's half of salary a month. Pewter's market was more and more narrow, hereafter; China's government tensed management of tin metal and forbade personal transaction of tin products. In addition, appearance many alternative material, such as glass, aluminum, stainless steel; the number of traditional tinsmiths decreased day after day apparently. (Shoukang Zhu, 1988) All above causes reduce to the depression of tin products in modern China. Western countries were the similar





condition, Britain as a western country's representative which has a long history of tin manufacture and faces the same recession in modern.

It is clear that there are many different characteristics between Malaysian modern pewter craftwork (MMPC) and China's pewter crafts (CPC) through comparison among two countries. The reasons why Malaysian modern pewter crafts had received a success, which is worth of our analyzing deeply from his developmental courses; Malaysia has a big social tolerance of different cultures and races, different races can contact in equal way and live together harmoniously, as Malaysian, Chinese, Indian and so on, everyone all know this is a multiple-races country.



From the academic literature and general discourse, Malaysia is popularly referred to as a multiethnic rather than a multi-civilizational society, in fact of Southeast Asian studies, one of the most popular and important terminologies is plural society, a term used by Furnivall (John Sydenham Furnivall 2014) over seven decades ago, his use of the term is very specific. A plural society is one in which many races or ethnic groups live side by side in separate geographical and socio-cultural enclaves, meeting only in the marketplace. There was no integration or assimilation to constitute a viable society. Malaysia under colonialism was considered such a plural society. When it attained independence in 1957, many collisions and dialogues in various cultures and religions, which is an indisputable contribution for culture's prosperity, attributing to intact and allow Malaysia to evolve into a relatively united nation of diverse ethnic groups.





In fact, Malaysia is a diverse country which is located in South-East Asia and renowned for its biodiversity, Malaysian society comprised three major ethnic communities, namely, the indigenous community or *bumiputera* (*lit. sons of the soil*), who accounted for 50 per cent of the population, and two sizable immigrant communities, one Chinese (37 per cent) and the other Indian (11 per cent). Since then, the censuses of 1970, 1980 and 1990 have shown that, in spite of the general increase in the population, from about 10 to 18 million, the ethnic composition has not changed significantly.

MMPC is different from China and other countries such as British or other European countries which is all a single or chief one cultural system relatively different from Malaysia apparently. MMPC can absorb numerous racial cultures which are from cultural icons and figures to its meaning. So, MMPC history is not only a kind of traditional forms but a miniature of Malaysian modern development history. In other word, we can understand the whole cultural structures of Malaysia by studying MMPC.

We can see various racial cultures from Malaysian pewter artifacts, such as Islam(Juan Eduardo Campo 2008), Buddhism(Sue Penney 1995), Confucianism(Sin Kiong Wong 2011), Taoism(Herrlee Glessner Creel 2012), Hinduism(Axel Michaels 2004), Jainism(Helmuth von Glasenapp 2009), Christian(George Wells Ferguson 2021) and so on. Sometime, we regarded MMPC as a hybrid in which it is easy to





find all kinds of ways of cultural symbols, including decorations, models, colors, thoughts as well as various aesthetics and racial signs and so forth; otherwise, the MMPC is very good at absorbing other countries' cultural features, for example, MMPC was commissioned for Chinese ceremonial pieces, Japanese tea set or tableware, Australian trophies, British beer cups and so forth, in addition, for various gifts, sports events and important events' souvenirs etc; in other words, MMPC was manufactured for world which love for peace and quiet.

“In the late 1970s, the Sultan was traveling in Perth, Australia, where he had a house. He stepped into a large department store with his entourage in tow and was respectfully asked by the sales assistants where he was from. “Selangor,” the Sultan answered. “Ah, Selangor Pewter,” the sales staff intoned. The Sultan was tickled that the Australians had heard of Selangor Pewter but not of the state of Selangor, not of the Sultan of Selangor.”(May Yee Chen 2003)

So, This thesis chooses Malaysian and China, the two countries has a relationship about traditional pewter craft and tries to compare Malaysian modern pewter crafts with Chinese pewter crafts in model, shape, decoration, materials, technique, cultural connotation, and design meaning etc for getting some experiences which can be borrowed to those countries which have plenty traditional crafts, how to revive traditional crafts in modern society of the world; and for conclusion some regulations which how to make ancient crafts to acculturate to the current people's aesthetic consumption. The thesis chose a series of judgmental examples out from numerous pewter crafts which came from Malaysian main pewter crafts companies and China main places of production, which gives a deep comparison for depiction from



different crafts' angles. It is clear that there is an important relationship between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts in pattern, shapes, and connotations.

The two countries comparison in pewter is not only at the art characteristics in pattern, shapes, and connotation, but also goes deep into the cultural symbols elements to analyze the symbol change with general semiotic theories. The Malaysian pewter crafts was from China, but transcended the design level of China's pewter crafts, showing more rich cultural features in pattern, shapes, and connotation. General explanation from design thoughts, craft techniques, materials etc, and iconographic comparison can't give an enough analysis about design awareness the Malaysian pewter crafts designers have. So, in this thesis, from main semiotic theories accepted widely, it is clear that similar design cultural elements from two countries' pewter crafts show different semiotic meanings and design intentions. This study is benefit to understand the design thinking that multicultural elements are incorporated into MMPC, and the regulation Malaysian pewter designers used in design action.

## 1.2 Background of Research

Pewter crafts as a traditional handicraft, it has a long development history in traditional pewter-making countries, such as Chinese, France, and British etc. Taking keywords – Pewter crafts; Tin crafts; Pewter handicrafts for searching document in



main academic websites as Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct, Google Scholar and so on, most of articles are main focus on the development history of pewter crafts, and the natural resource of pewter distribution or the level of tin exploitation etc. For example, the book “*Phaidon guide to Pewter*” gives a detailed introduction about development history of European and American pewter crafts (Vanessa Brett, 1981). The book “*The Royal Selangor Story*” records the history of the biggest pewter company in Malaysia with rich pictures and texts (Chen May Yee, 2003). The article, “*Tin: Resource of Malaysia*”, introducing the tin natural resource of distribution in whole Malaysia with rich data (Sophiejoynrm, 2016). The book “*Crafting a postcolonial (Inter)national identity: Malaysian pewter company Royal Selangor’s branding strategies (1970-1992)*”(Yong Yen Nie, 2022), from Chinese academic literacy searching data, it is main on Chinese traditional pewter craft (CTPC) techniques, history and cultural meaning so on, such as Tian Gong Kai Wu, author is Song Yin Xing in Ming dynasty. The analysis of Chinese pewter culture and DaoKou pewter crafts, Shang Xun cen 1987. The art research of Chinese pewter crafts, Geng Xiang Chong, Soo Chow University 2013, etc. Those articles give a clear context about the development condition and special relationship between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts.

Taking design cultural elements, multicultural design, and design cultural awareness and traditional cultures as keywords for searching academic data, there are many articles about multicultural design, education and social problems studies. It is





easy to see that the multicultural elements theme is discussed hotly in modern crafts design, design education. For example: Developing multicultural awareness through designs based on family cultural heritage: application, impact and implications. (Stephanie Clemons, 2005). Hedonic and multicultural factors in product design that improve the user experience. (Gonzalez-Sanchez, 2013) Two articles discuss the role of multicultural elements in educational and product designs in terms of respective conditions. Further more, Multicultural web design: a review. (Cermak, 2016) N-Culturals: modeling the multicultural identity. (Pekerti, 2016) The concept of multicultural personality: an ethnic mestizo perspective. (Ramirez, 1999) The multicultural factors are important cognition in education issues.



The semiotics is from the understanding of modern linguistics; one of representative figures is F. de Saussure, France. He regarded language as a kind of symbol system for showing people's concept. In his theory, symbols are decided into signifier icons and signified icons, which constitutes the basic concepts in European semiotic study. Another semiologist, Charles Sanders Peirce, American, from the pragmatic logic philosophy, symbols are composed of mediator (sign vehicle), objective (referent) and interpretation (sense). Three aspects constitute a triangle structure which can be put forward to generate new mediator, objective and interpretation. This is an important theory borrowed in the study. Charles William Morris, well known American semiologist, from modern logistics and linguistics, he thinks that the nature of symbolization process is one kind of human social behavior,





and Meta language. Semiotics can be interpreted from three sub-branched disciplines as syntactic, semantics and pragmatic. Susanne L. Longer, American philosophy and esthetician, she combines semiotics and esthetics, and proposes the esthetic theory of art semiotic concept. Symbols not only have a function of sending information and signifier, but also can create shape and structure. Symbols are divided into deductive icons and expressing images icons. The cultural semiotics of Jorgen Dines Johansen and Svend Erik Larsen, which gives detailed analysis about the symbolization evolution of cultural elements, this theory can be used to explain symbols in art works.



Taking art design symbols, cultural symbolization evolution, cultural elements symbols as keywords for searching data in main academic websites, there are many articles about the application of traditional symbols in design and products, especially in countries which have rich traditional cultures. Organizational symbols and culture (Lee G Bolman, 2017), Traditional visual symbols and modern (Zhu Shouhui, 2007). Two articles analyze the influence of traditional cultural symbols in art and design. Material symbols and the interpretation of cultural change (Peter S. Wells, 1995). The article takes ceramic vessels product for case study, giving an analysis of cultural symbolic systems. From Chinese academic data, there are some important books and articles about cultural design symbolization. Such as: Art semiotics (Zhao Yiheng, 2023), Advertising semiotics (Rao Guangxiang, 2014). Design semiotics (Xu Hengchun, 2008). The concepts about cultural symbolization in three books are basic



theoretic frame of semiotic theories in this thesis research analysis.

Moreover, in order to get enough pewter crafts samples for achieving the research aims in this dissertation, author spent several months to collect relevant pewter craft works, and contacted with main Malaysian pewter companies by visit on sites, telephone, Whatsapp, email and other ways. The total number of collection relative pewter crafts images about Malaysian and Chinese pewter craftwork (CPC) is more than 500 pieces. It is a basic feature that Malaysian modern pewter crafts show multicultural symbols. Different cultural elements not only make pewter craftwork show different cultural meanings, but also make local designers have a rich design aspiration and skills. The following plate1.1 shows four different cultural icons in Malaysian pewter crafts.

**Plate1.1***Multicultural elements in MMPC*

Source: from left to right, the Islamic Words Plate, the plate decorated with

Islamic pattern and calligraphy, Tumasek pewter Sdn Bhd 1965, size is 14(DIA) cm, medium size, dinning entertain category, pewter material. A jug produced by KL pewter Sdn Bhd 1986, name is Elephant Jug, size is 22(L) X10(W)X10(H)cm, medium size, livig category, peweter and gold materials. The elephant shape handle is a clear image; elephant image is an auspicious icon in Asian traditional and religious cultures, especially in Indian religions. A clock designed by Crystal pewter Sdn Bhd 1977, name is Clock Ornament, size is 18(L) X15(W)X28(H)cm, medium size, living category, pewter, glass and other materials. It included classic European cultural icons. A tea caddy, It is from Royal Selangor pewter Sdn Bhd 1997, name is Warrior Tea Caddy, size is 12.5(H)X7.5(DIA)cm, medium size, living category, pewter material.

Rich decorating patterns are from English cultures.

In fact, the richness of cultural variety in Malaysian pewter crafts is more than the four kinds of cultural icons in above plate. According to PhD thesis research standard and author’s real condition, it is not easy to clarify so much cultural features, the broad research aims and purposes will blur the study objectives and problems. So, this thesis chooses Malaysia and China two countries, giving a detailed study and comparison along with reference to other countries’ traditional pewter crafts.

**Plate1.2**

*The comparison between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts.*

Malaysian Pewter	Chinese Pewter	Malaysian Pewter	Chinese Pewter
 <p>Forms: Melon-shaped Medium: Tin Year: 1970s Country: Malaysia Royal Selangor Size:30X28X20cm</p>	 <p>Forms: Melon-shaped Medium: Tin Year: 1920s Country: China Size:25X23X37cm</p>	 <p>Forms: Cubics with Words Medium: Tin Year: 1980s Country: Malaysia Size:28X25X38cm</p>	 <p>Forms: Cubics with Words Medium: Tin Year: 1910s Country: China Size:28X25X28cm</p>

Source: A Pumpukin Teapot, Royal Selangor pewter Sdn Bhd 1979, size is 30(L)X28(W)X20(H)cm, medium size, living category, pewter and gold materials. A Chinese Pumpukin Teapot, produced from China 1922, size is 25(L)X23(W)X38(H)cm, medium size, living category, pewtermaterial. A Stamp



Teapot, designed from Royal Selangor pewter Sdn Bhd 1989, size is 28(L)X25(W)X38(H)cm, medium size, living category, pewter and gold materials. A Words Teapot, China 1915, size is 28(L)X25(W)X28(H)cm, medium size, living category, pewter and jade materials.

The left two are pumpkin image; right two are same teapot image with Chinese calligraphy. Similar cultural icons show different forms in shape, pattern, and connotation. From superficial design elements, the difference is not clear, but combining semiotic theory, the change process will give a clarification about the change steps from traditional Chinese cultural icons to design cultural elements incorporated into Malaysian pewter crafts. Through a analysis of design cultural symbolization process between two countries' similar cultural elements, using semiotic and art semiotic theories, author excavates the regulation of cultural symbols' change, and different cultural elements incorporated into Malaysian modern pewter craft works, and the method of reviving traditional crafts in modern markets.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

As aforementioned, Malaysian pewter crafts and companies won many awards from domestic and international famous design or manufacturer competitions. Such as: the New and Improved Product Development Award from the federation of Malaysian





Manufacturers in several years continuously (Chen May Yee, 2003), "red dot" awards (Peter Zec 2006), the Industrial Designers Society of America, the Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organization (Chen May Yee, 2003), etc. Same Malaysian pewter crafts companies acquired many famous pewter crafts enterprises in advanced countries. Such as: Englefields, the 300-year-old London maker of Crown & Rose pewter, the London silver company Comyns, along with some 350 historic silver designs dating back to the 17th century, Seagull Pewter, Canada's biggest pewtermaker, etc. Looking back at China, the modern pewter crafts had severe decline and stagnant condition, which is depicted in articles and books of the modern history of Chinese pewter industry or crafts (Geng Xiao Cheng, 2013).



It is recorded that China has a long history of traditional pewter crafts, but in modern time, why does the world know Malaysian modern pewter crafts, not China? The reason is complicated, through a comparison between MMPC and Chinese pewter crafts in pattern, shape, model, and connotation, there are many similar design cultural elements among the two countries, and these elements are from China according to the history of Malaysian pewter crafts, showing different features and meanings. In addition, the MMPC shows characteristics more than Chinese pewter crafts from these angles, taking the similar design elements in two countries' pewter crafts for example, what is the difference of similar design cultural elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter craft works?



**Figure 1.1**

*The origin of the research problems about Malaysian pewter crafts*



The table 1.1 showing, the pewter craft was spread to Malaysia and won a world reputation. But in today's China, the majority of people really don't know there was prosperity about the CTPC for a long time in the past. The traditional pewter craft almost is forgotten in Chinese modern markets. As aforementioned, a comparison between two countries' pewter crafts, although there is a same origin between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts, the difference of similar design cultural elements is apparent. The research is benefit to understand the regulation of design cultural elements evolution, and conclude the reason of the success Malaysian modern pewter craft had achieved.

After a comparison between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts, from the laws of cultural development, there are some different meanings of the design elements in two countries' pewter crafts. From more than 500 local pewter crafts, selecting 30 samples, giving a careful comparison between Malaysian and Chinese pewter craft works, there are many similar design cultural elements between two countries' pewter crafts. From iconography (including shape, color, structure, material, craftsmanship,



design thought and others) and semiotics (including semiotic triangles, cultural semiotics and behaviorism semiotics), these similar elements show differences, some features are nuance, other are apparent difference on function and meanings. The feature influenced the design of local pewter crafts from superficial aesthetic characteristics to inner cognitions and meanings.

From the theories points of the semiotic triangle, the cultural semiotics and the behaviorist symbolism, the design cultural elements of the Malaysian pewter crafts had changed, investigating the features and changing with rich documents and iconographic images. The change is analyzed mainly on the course of whole design cultural elements from initial status to the feature in local pewter crafts. Firstly, the thesis gives an iconographic narrative about the differences. Next step, giving a whole semiotic analysis, from Pirce's semiotic triangles, Medium, Objective and Interpretation, it can show the process of the cultural elements change from an especial priod of time to the new social condition. Next, from the three aspects of the cultural semiotics, time and space, body and subject, action and action model, it can show the different interpretation of cultural meaning from the old element to new status in local pewter crafts. Finaly, from the behaviorism semiotics, syntactics, semantics and pragmatics, it gives a conclusion the difference of the symbolization process between two countries' pewter crafts.





The success of Malaysian pewter crafts in modern markets provides a good example for the healthy development of traditional crafts. Many concrete methods and measures the local pewter crafts industries and designers have done with rich historical documents. From the above theories referenced, especially the cultural semiotic theories, numerous historical facts about the experiences and measures the Malaysian pewter crafts industries and designers had taken and done, which can be classified into different cultural semiotic categories. These can form a whole or integration to explain the causes of revival the local pewter crafts in modern markets, avoiding the messy, isolated views, values and judgements from different individual perspectives and standpoints. The analysis is different with the popular narrative of the current issues published; the majority of these theses give an explanation from some concrete aspect or angle, as technique, craft, cultural features, inheriting, innovation, modernization etc, failure to discuss the problem from the perspective of the whole cultural development laws, especially from the cultural semiotics.

#### **1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Research**

Design cultural elements refer to the integration of symbols, patterns, colors, materials, styles, etc. from a specific culture into design works in order to convey cultural connotations, emotions or values. (Smith, J. 2018) Through comparison and deep research, it is not only a showing multi-culture, but also is creation from tradition to





modern in MMPC. With the world's economy development and technological progress, the world will become smaller. Every country pays a more attention to own native cultures and customs for getting the feeling of existence, maybe there is a way after studying MMPC, the main aims and objectives as below:

- I. Studying the effect of the difference of design cultural elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts.
- II. Understanding the process of symbolizing evolution of the similar design cultural elements from Chinese traditional pewter crafts to Malaysian modern pewter crafts.
- III. Studying the causes of the success Malaysian modern pewter craft and industry had achieved in modern markets and society.



### **1.5 Research Questions**

By watching and analysis various samples collected from different ways, such as from companies, printed papers, museums etc. The MMPC showing abundant shapes or faces, they came from different cultures or races, which were adjusted to be suitable to the structures or decoration in MMPC. Among them there are many academic problems worth studying on our best. So, the main research questions as following:



- I. What is the difference of similar design cultural elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter craft works?
- II. What's the symbolization evolution of the design cultural elements from Chinese traditional pewter craftwork to MMPC?
- III. How can Malaysian pewter craft industry achieve a revival of traditional pewter craft in modern market?

**Table 1.1***The research problems, questions and aims in the studies*

	<b>Research Problems</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Research Aims</b>
1	After a comparison between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts, from the laws of cultural development, there are some different meanings of the similar design elements in two countries' pewter crafts.	What is the difference of similar design cultural elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter craft works?	Studying the effect of the difference of similar design cultural elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter craft works
2	From the theories points of the semiotic triangle, the cultural semiotics and the behaviorist symbolism, the design cultural elements of the Malaysian pewter crafts had changed, investigating the features and changing with rich documents and iconographic images.	What's the symbolizing evolution of the similar design cultural elements from Chinese traditional pewter craftwork to Malaysian modern pewter craftwork?	Understanding the process of symbolizing evolution of the similar design cultural elements from Chinese traditional pewter craftwork to Malaysian modern pewter craftwork.
3	The success of Malaysian pewter crafts in modern markets provides a good example for the healthy development of traditional crafts. Many concrete methods and measures the local pewter crafts industries and designers have done with rich historical documents.	How can Malaysian pewter craft industry achieve a revival of traditional pewter craft in modern market?	Studying the causes of the success Malaysian modern pewter craft and industry had achieved in modern markets and society.



## 1.6 Limitations and Delimitations

Any research wants to achieve a success, which must limit the areas or parameter of research to confirm the effectiveness in studying. So do the studying in MMPC which can achieve a success in its special background; Malaysia is a country which has multiple races and languages, and is located at intersection of east-west. Exposing sophisticated social features, MMPC is regarded as a hybrid (Richard G Harrison 1993) which involves many racial features. The research in this dissertation is that the relationship between MMPC and Chinese pewter crafts, what differences and connection among them in pattern, shape, model, connotation and semiotics etc. So, this thesis limits the research areas of MMPC and CPC from the three aspects.



### 1.6.1 Limitations of pewter works

MMPC has a wide range that includes different kinds of usages; this thesis mainly touches upon artifacts which came from the Malaysian main pewter companies, and all artworks contain plentiful cultures symbols except for tin tools or tin production tools. The areas of MMPC mainly include jewelry/accessories, clothing/shoes, home living, wedding/party, toys/entertainment, art/collectibles, vases pitchers, beer mug et cetera in the light of pewter artifacts industry' habits.

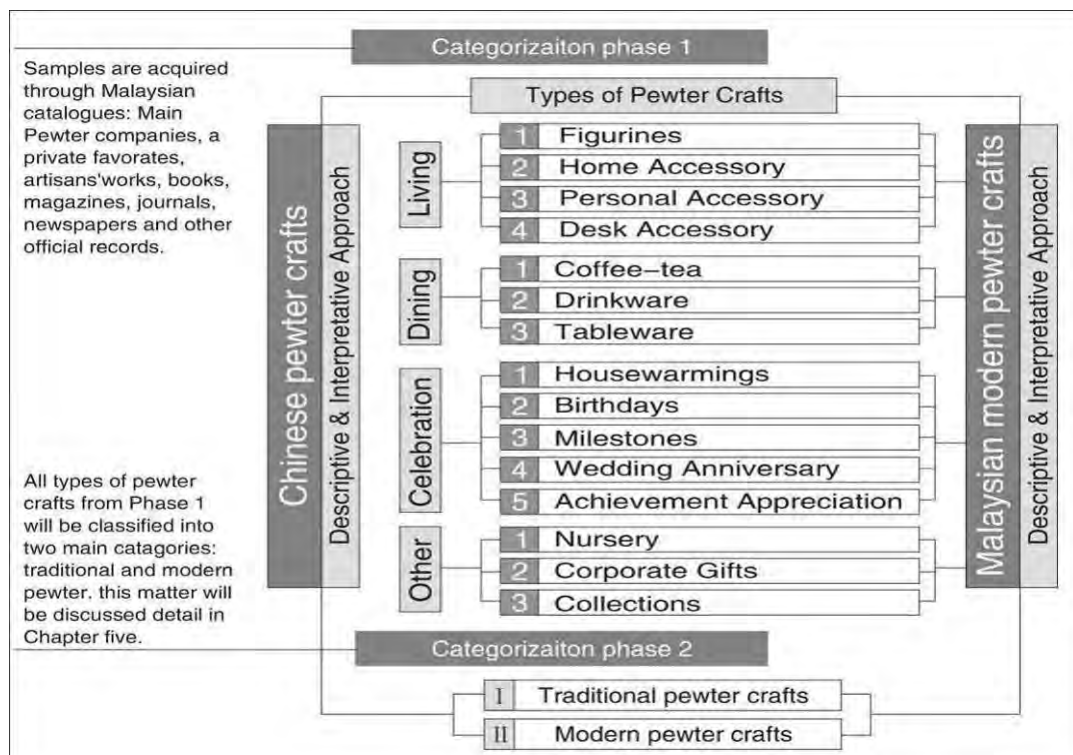


According to the MMPC which shows various cultural features, the research correspondingly chooses pewter artworks or other crafts which involve similar cultural features in China, which must satisfy fully the comparison and certification with MMPC in achievement the research aims in the thesis.

As follow (figure1.2), it shows us delimitations in this thesis, a summary of cultural features from various forms in MMPC, and corresponding comparison with Chinese pewter crafts. All crafts or artworks can be classified to concrete and abstract features, concrete symbols main in shape, pattern, and model etc, abstract features main in connotation, and motif. There various and abundant data among this comparison which includes horizontal and vertical contrasts in this table.

**Figure 1.2**

*Limitation of the pewter crafts, source: original*





## 1.6.2 Limitations of craftsmen/ corporations

In Malaysia, because pewter artifacts are belonged to crafts or practical artworks, the majority of tin ware made in some pewter companies, although there is a sign name on tin ware, the name is companies' name rather than some craftsman or artisan came from some company. This is the case that family firms (Panikkos Poutziouris 2008) with a long and leading presence control economy in the Malaysia, even about 40 percent of publicly listed companies which the top ten families own a quarter of total market capitalization of Malaysian stock exchange, so do Malaysian pewter manufacture.



“A major concern about family firms with a long and leading presence in the Malaysian economy is that they have no reputation for producing brand products, i.e., a consumer good or service embodied in a trademark, design or symbol that has emerged as a household name (Acker 2002; Anholt 2005). This is the case even though families control about 40 per cent of publicly listed companies, while the top ten families own a quarter of total market capitalization of the country's stock exchange, Bursa Malaysia. Three of the top ten quoted firms are family controlled.” (Edmund Terence Gomez, Wong Yee Tuan 2014)

This thesis's limitations concentrate main pewter companies and their notable craftsmen or artisans, such as Anders Quistgaard, Erik Magnussen, Tan Jooi Chong and so on; Crystal Pewter (M) Sdn Bhd, Oriental Pewter Sdn Bhd, resent & Artifact, Royal Selangor International Sdn Bhd, Pewter Art Trophy Manufacturers Sdn. Bhd, Tumasek Pewter Sdn Bhd, Headquarters, Tin Tank Centre & Factory, Zatfee (M) Sdn





Bhd, among it, Royal Selangor is biggest family corporation which has the longest history and most reputation, The Sultan of Selangor conferred Selangor Pewter the warrant of “Royal Pewter” due to its famous brand in world. In addition, abundant pewter works are belonged to results of team’s labors; it is difficult to distinguish who is its creator, even only a company name sealed.

The Chinese pewter crafts show a serious degeneration in modern time. With the economic development from the social reformation and opening, people begin to regain interest about pewter crafts gradually with a sense of nostalgia. The Chinese traditional pewter areas begins to resume production, such as, Si Bao town in Fu Jian province, Yong Kang Zhi Ying town in Zhe Jiang province, Lai Wu in Shan Dong province, and Ge Jiu in Yun Nan province etc. But these areas are distributed and imitate the traditional pewter shapes and patterns basically, no innovation. So the Chinese pewter crafts which are chosen in this thesis, come from traditional pewter crafts, not restriction some areas or enterprises.

### 1.6.3 Periodical Limitations

The time is a significant parameter in valuing MMPC, which can limit the scope of artworks in collection data. Malaysian pewter artifacts originated from 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was brought by a Chinese family from Shantou city Guangdong province in





China. (Chen May Yee, 2003) If the beginning of time in this thesis is too early, the multi-cultures attribute is not clear, and it is difficult to sample artworks. So, this thesis research concerned on Malaysian modern pewter crafts. There are different dividing according to different norms, most of people thought that the modern history from 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, after mid 20<sup>th</sup> century is contemporary history. (Khadija Caroll La, 2011) This essay mainly refers to the modern history of Malaysian pewter products, especially analyzes the pewter artworks from 1990 to 2010 in main Malaysian pewter companies. This period of time includes or shows overview of Malaysian modern pewter artifacts in main companies, which is the mature period of time in their development, and is clear in characteristics in this thesis' aims in studying. The Chinese pewter crafts are chosen in this thesis are from traditional pewter crafts, not restriction definitive time due to the Chinese pewter crafts' severe degeneration in modern time. The Chinese pewter crafts are chosen as close to modern time as possible, in the same condition, the study chooses a craft which is protected well and the time is close to now.

### **1.7 Significance of the Research**

Through studying and comparison between multi-cultural characteristics in MMPC and Chinese pewter crafts from their connotation changed consecutively. Understanding the different cultural connotation and showing in different time steps.





This research aims contribute to understand how to develop traditional crafts in modern society in the world which is in information and globalization (George Ritzer 2019). Same time contributing to comprehend a traditional artifacts how to flourish in a various races country, which is a good sample for other countries have plentiful traditional crafts. History is a mirror which we can know ourselves better, traditional arts stem from history and exceed it, we can understand what thoughts modern people think in their hearts, and resolve many today's problems from studying spirits of traditional arts.

### 1.7.1 Implications of this thesis to traditional crafts



How to protect and develop traditional artifacts is a hard problem in today modern society, maybe here are some good ways after a comparison studies between Malaysian and Chinese modern pewter craftwork. Exploration the success in MMPC is beneficial to promote public awareness on protection and exploitation traditional crafts, people should respect and understand various racial cultures under equal standard. Contribution to pay attention to collect and organize all data, it includes theoretical and technical contents from traditional crafts and legacies, which can protect traditional cultures in classification way. After studying the success in MMPC is beneficial to the combination between traditional crafts and modern social condition, which can give a new face to our traditional cultures. Promoting people to





identify with traditional cultures and crafts, it can benefit to extract and cultivate our racial spirits from traditional crafts.

### **1.7.2 Contributions to the public institutions and society**

The traditional crafts is a important part of modern society, even regarding it as parts of a significant capability of modern countries, it is called often as “National soft power”(Yasushi Watanabe 2015), which every country tries their best to promote it in today society. After studying MMPC, it is beneficial to communicate among different races on equal footing and accepting different ethnic cultural features each other. Contribution to promotion the pubic institutions’ awareness, maintain the social wholeness and cultural diversity with equity and justice. The research is beneficial to the public institutions to organize all kinds of resources for formulation a systematical rule in the cultural healthy development. Contribution to the harmony of whole society from inner cultural features, maybe it is useful to face and deal with things with broad cultural vision.





### 1.7.3 Contributions to arts education

Arts education is one vital direction of country's education, which includes a complex subjects, along with progress of technology and promotion of people's living, Arts education become more and more important in today society. Beneficial to put multicultural awareness into the syllabus of basic education, it is contribution to formulation a system which is suitable to the self-development regulation of art and craft education. The studying is Contribution to related institutes attaching more important to traditional arts education and understanding the development of traditional handicrafts comprehensively in modern social arts education. It is beneficial to making traditional art and craft education open and international, studying and reference among countries which are rich in traditional cultures and folk legacies.

### 1.8 Research Methods and Procedures

Research methods in this thesis mainly are iconography or iconology and semiotics or cultural semiotics. The procedure mainly includes data collection, sampling, iconographic analysis, cultural semiotic analysis and conclusion in the comparison between Malaysian and Chinese modern pewter craftwork (*Figure 1.5*).





Evaluating the artifact from the life of the artisan or handicraftsman is an effort to link the artwork with a historical context. The IA is a way that enunciates the meaning of artifacts through historical affinity, which refers to the time when the artifact was produced. In the different event, place or time, artifacts will deal with the different artisans. Every one has its own unique facts and will make different assumptions. Therefore, the interpretation in accordance with iconography will always depend on historical evidence to support the construction of data, explanation and giving a meaning (*Figure 1.3*). In 1912, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) explains the different of the terms iconology and iconography, then codifies the concept of *kunstwollen* and adapting the Mannheim analysis model to develop a three stages theory of iconographical interpretation in a more systematic way. Panofsky outlined three steps of analysis as: i. The phase of pre-iconographic description is based on direct observation and description of the main objects and the natural subject matters, "motif" or "original form" which constitutes the basic meaning which exists in the familiarity of the objects and the events. ii. The phase of iconographic description that sheds a light on the properties of conventional imaging and its relevance to the theme, story or metaphor. iii. The phase of iconological interpretation which composes the "true meaning" in explaining the symbolic value of a work of art. Through analysis in iconography, getting a rough meaning about the sample in thesis, next step goes into semiotic analysis.





The main semiotic theories in this thesis are from Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles William Morris and Jorgen Dines Johansen. The semiotic triangle structure theory from Charles Sanders Peirce, from pragmatic logic philosophy, every one symbol is composed of mediator (sign vehicle), objective (referent) and interpretation (sense). Also one symbol includes the three aspects contents and meanings, three aspects aren't closed, and they can generate new contents along with new symbol interpretation over time. The research questions of This thesis is focused on cultural symbols in two pewter craft works, so, basis on the three aspects, the symbol interpretation(sense) is based on cultural semiotic theory. Jorgen Dines Johansen and Svend Erik Larsen depicted fully in the book "Signs in Use — an introduction to semiotics" (*Figure 3.3 and 3.4*) what is cultural semiotics and how to be a cultural symbol from objects to signs. The book's theory chiefly focus three inter-relative points from cultural semiotics, one, the borders of a culture in relation to its natural foundation, two, the conditional requirements set for these borders to allow them to create culture, three, the codes and structures. They paid attention to former two items, how do objects become signs, what conditions objects must have can transfer icons which are belonged to cultural symbols? So, cultural semiotic three aspects are basic structure for interpreting symbol change between two countries' pewter crafts. Next step, the thesis gives a further analysis of cultural symbols in Malaysian pewter crafts with the behavior symbolic theory from Charles William Morris. The behavior symbolic theory is composed of syntactic, semantics and pragmatic. From the three aspects can verify the symbol change of design cultural elements between two



countries' pewter crafts.

This thesis gathers plentiful pewter which can represent every culture from the rationales of semiotics and iconography; moreover, collecting numerous pewter which can express every phrase of cultural evolution from semiotics that it is saying how a icon turns into a symbol; then, there is a comparison of cultural features in order to certificate the symbolization process of cultural symbol elements between Malaysian and Chinese pewter crafts, and also show a hybrid composed with various religious cultures in Malaysian pewter crafts.

Through studying these culture's features, it can explain the design cultural elements structure in Malaysian pewter crafts, and the method of different cultural elements incorporated into Malaysian pewter crafts. What's difference between these cultures features comparison with similar cultural elements in Chinese pewter crafts? The study can assist designers to understand how to change cultural symbolic features from their original appearance to components of cultural elements in MMPC from the theory of semiotics and iconography (*Figure 3.2 and 3.4*).

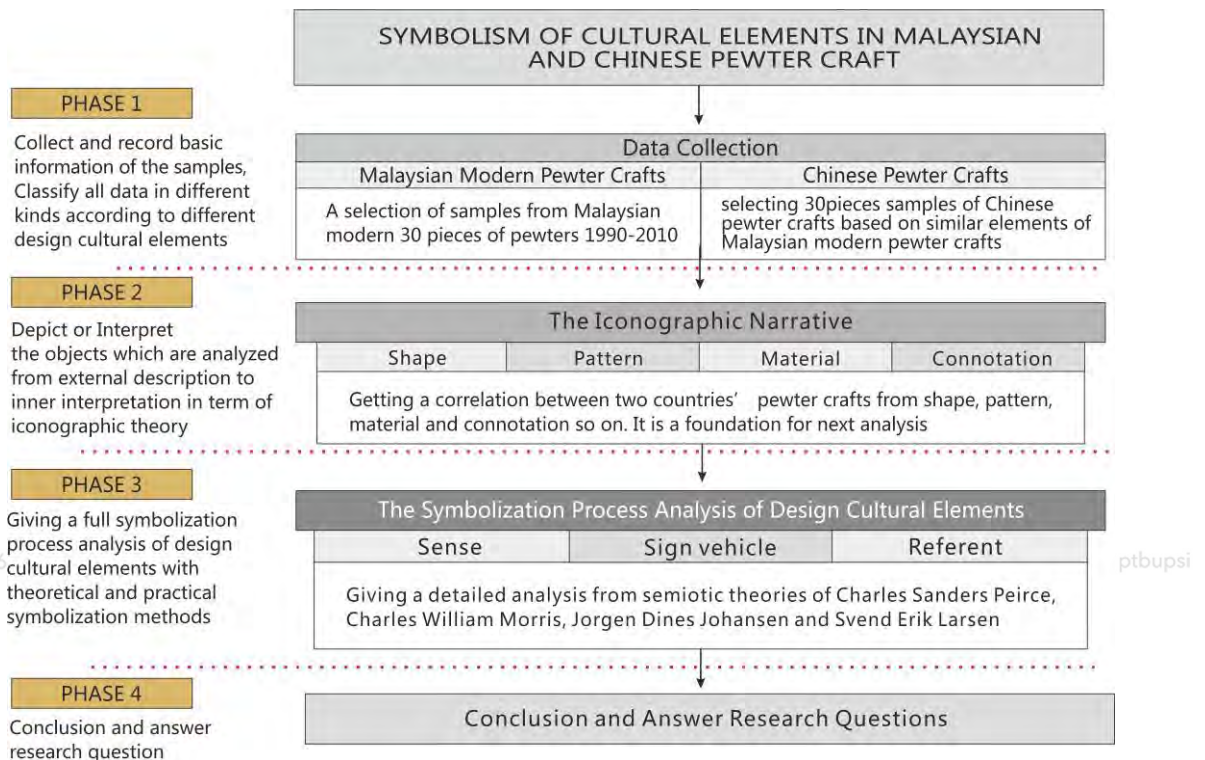
## **Research Design**

This study will be conducted through qualitative research with three methods of data collection which are literature studies, visual studies and interviews of respondents.

The detail of the research design methodology is as shown in the table below (Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3**

*The whole frame methodology in the Thesis, source: original*



### 1.9 Preliminary Conclusion

There isn't a long history of pewter in Malaysia comparison with his abundant tin mine, modern pewter facing a flourishing development, which is meaningful for us researching carefully. From studying many pewter works is an effective way in which we can get the comparison between MMPC with Chinese cultural features, an obvious



figure of the connection among various racial icons which forms from a long time accumulation from semiotics and iconography.

A sophisticated comparison between MMPC construction with racial features' construction that involves various essences or phases from a ordinary icon or form to symbol or one of semiotics, which calls horizontal comparison; one another, the vertical comparison in racial feature that is composed of many layers and phases, very one all are courses of symbols' development from the theory of semiotics.

Through assembling relative data come from symbols' historic evolution, this thesis will form a clear lines to compare MMPC multi-cultures features with CPC single culture, moreover, the comparison among plentiful data or essences, we can get many outcomes from semiotics and iconography to form a multi-dimensions (Bahram Javidi 2014). It will strongly express the significances of MMPC in modern society of Malaysia. Follow are more theoretical narratives about status of MMPC.

This thesis divided six chapters mainly, there is a full texts elaborating of MMPC next chapter, and a way in which how to analyze MMPC in four chapter. So a clear theoretical structure will appear in your sights step by step.

