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Islamic Elements of Plants Selection on Malay Landscape in Kota Bharu City, Kelantan, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: In this research, Islamic elements of plants selection on Malay Landscape in Kota Bharu city, Kelantan, Malaysia was accomplished. Islamic religion transferred to Tanah Melayu since long ago had conquered Malay society's culture and surrounding. **Objective:** The nature of Islam can be compatible with a wide variety of cultures facilitate the acceptance of Islam in Tanah Melayu. Promulgation or preaching done by traders who come cause assimilation of Malay society. Assimilation of the culture of Islam that occurred in the Malay community greatly changed the pattern of life directly or indirectly, including the environment. **Results:** In the proceeding research in Kota Bharu city of Islam which is eagerly developed by Municipality Council of Kota Bharu (Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu), the attempt of inserting Islamic landscape motif in the city is under progress. Misinterpretation of Islam in understanding the landscape angle applied to the Kota Bharu city's landscape affect local cultural landscape. Consequently, these values have eroded local Malay traditional landscape. Application of floras species mostly from Middle East did change the environment of Malay landscape. **Conclusion:** Therefore, this research will view the Islamic elements of plant selection on Malay landscape to pin out crystal clear point of view of the values apprehension beside the ability to sustain Malay identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The previous researches mentioned that religion plays important role in dominating individual point of view of a place through city design. Religion values not only affecting the organisation of a city also the area used including floras inculcation or landscape with particular tree species. Landscape could be advertise as culture practice of an active area, which is a process to know one another and it is a factor that could help social shaping process and also subjective to the identity (Mitchell, 1994). This shaping process is a symbol to belief and values of a cultural ethnic in homogeneous and heterogeneous society which known as cultural landscape (Ismail, 2001). According to Zaharah's passage (2004), in Peter (1975) statement which is society structure organisation, language, religious, material technology, belief, institution, culture and genetic group could be characterised into human society group.

Malay landscape also very synonym with the Mother Nature motif elements application such as flora and fauna, wood carving and other natural related elements and it is indirectly related to his/her creator. Relationship that could be visualised between Malay landscape and the religion (Islam) are very clear in which Islamic elements clearly practiced in Malay society's daily routine especially from the landscape angle itself. Therefore, this research able to view the compatibility between Malay landscapes with Islamic teachings. This research covers from the angle of opinion and apprehension of skilful academics of this field.

Research Background:

The development of Islam starts around 13th century and continually diffuses and evolves till it ends the long-time exploitation of Hindu and Buddha influence in Tanah Melayu (Aziz, 1978). The religion is the core religion to the Malays until today. Influence from Islam religion conveyed by Arabic merchants has indirectly more or less dominated landscape scenario in Malaysia. Hindu religion the first comes to Tanah Melayu before Islam has a major manipulation over Malay society's culture. The presence of Islam later then destroys the

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belief and custom brought in by Hindu according to order (Othman, 1989). Islamic teachings that are more incline toward humble characteristic and appreciating the nature is the factor causing Islam are easily accepted among Malay society (Jelani, 2004). The compatibility did cause Malay society are more facilitate to approaching Islam.

Landscape architecture development in Kota Bharu city, Kelantan, Malaysia which is known as Islamic city has a major domination of Middle East design concept that affecting the erosion of Malay's own landscape identity. Mohd Tajuddin (2003) sees this matter as '*Middle Eastern Inferiority Complex*' that occur in the interior character of a nation, as the Islam followers in Malaysia owns humble characteristic toward architecture in Middle East because Islam's birth place is Middle East.

In Kelantan, social and political advancement of this state was designed by Islam until Kelantan is known as '*Mecca Balcony*' (Muhammad Na'im, 2002), with landscape development concept in Kota Bharu city is depending on Islamic city concept based on Islamic elements in the art of landscape architecture. By following 5K philosophy which comprehend scholarly (*keilmuan*), conformity (*kepatuhan*), welfare (*kebajikan*), hygiene (*kebersihan*) and well-being (*kesejahteraan*), Municipality Council of Kota Bharu-Islamic City (MPKB-BRI) has a role in designing Islamic city advancement in Kota Bharu city wholly nearing year 2015 (Suhana & Marsitah, 2009). In this research context, Kota Bharu city known as Islamic city or the city of Islam is mostly influenced by Middle East architecture concept and is clearly could be seen the application of exterior elements from soft landscape usage aspect (softscape) and hard landscape (hardscape) in landscape designing without maintaining Malay identity value. MPKB-BRI endeavour in shaping the surrounding that reflect Islam character from landscape aspect, in which the type of flora usage for soft landscape such as *Phoenix dactylifera* spp. (date palm) mostly utilised in landscape in Kota Bharu city.

Effect from this imitation, Kota Bharu city is facing identity confusion problem also hindering local landscape development for allowing exterior landscape elements set their foot without control. This matter has resurrect the issue of distinguishing Malay identity landscape that suitable with Islamic elements to be insert into soft landscape in Kota Bharu city to generate a more harmony landscape in absence of any identity confusion.

Research Design & Methods:

This research is carried out to identify Islamic elements based on plants selection for Malay landscape at Kota Bharu city, Kelantan, Malaysia. Research paradigm in this research involves qualitative method as whole. Application of qualitative method in this research is very eligible due to the acquired data are more complete, clearer and exact in explaining the acquired information without blockade of certain questions. It enable researcher provide descriptive relating the acquired data from the research made perspective. Research method in this research is by utilizing theory and approaches. In this research, the acquired data will be describe in form of descriptive and analysis. The acquired data is not widely applied the statistic software method. *N-VIVO* software aid is used in assisting analysing the acquired data more accurate and fast.

Theory & Approach in Primer Data:

Perspective theory applied is assimilation theory approach. Assimilation theory is utilized in order to describe the process of acceptance of a foreign culture trait by a community, in which evaluation and reception process of a culture. The one culture trait will be accepted for practice as long as it has no contradiction with local values of a community. As there is compatibility, the culture trait will be assimilated with local community lifestyle. In the research that will be undergone, the focus of the culture trait is the aspect of Islamic elements in plants selection in Malay landscape.

Paine & Taylor Approach Selection:

Model method used is based on Paine & Taylor approach (1975). This approach is applied to assist the researcher as the clue and reference in overall of a culture landscape.

- a. Nature : The effect upon Mother Nature and the continuous changes.
- b. Culture : Human effect or interaction with the surrounding nature.
- c. Observation : Visual perception toward landscape by the expert or the experience one.
- d. Meaning : Landscape definition for the personal or the group.

This method provides aid in gaining the information qualitatively and suitable to be utilized for areas that own strong culture element also their own nature element. This model is apt to apply in this research which covers factor of the surrounding, the culture, the visual, the meaning to visualise Islamic elements in plant selection for Malay landscape. Academic research including research obtained from journal, book, article and past research are the source from secondary data. This process includes combination of academic data research, data collection and data analysis to reach research result.

Tool /Instrument in the Research:

To use Paine & Taylor approach also theory as research methodology, data collecting process in this research involves three techniques which are observation technique, interview technique and document research. These techniques are very suitable in data and information collection of the undergoing research. At earlier stage of the research, the researcher provides concentration toward research area observation. The proceeding of observation process includes three stages which are public observation, specific observation and exclusive observation.

Besides applying observation technique, the researcher also utilises interview technique. This interview technique is necessary in this research to obtain information that could not be acquired through observation. Interview is made upon the involved academician as the informant that could provide explanation of issues in the research question. The presented questions toward the informant are the open questions. The purpose is to make the informant easily gives more crystal clear and free suggestion or idea in offering information to the researcher.

The accomplishment of interview technique toward these informants is executed on three different stages as it was stated by Ramle (2001), which is public interview, specific interview and exclusive interview. The following are the interview that was done by the researcher to the informant:

- i. Public interview : Public interview is carried out by bring forward the same question to all the interviewed informants by the researcher. This public interview is more into public questions in form of suggestion and current idea.
- ii. Specific interview : In this specific interview, researcher will provide question related to the issue and also question in the research. This interview is executed on the chosen informant base on their own field to gain certain information and data.
- iii. Exclusive interview : For exclusive interview session, the researcher interviews significant informant who has specific knowledge, accurate and related with the research question to gain more specific data.

The researcher also makes reference of articles from the past researcher to obtain additional information also as a part of basic data in this research. Interview on the informant is done by individual and the interview process is progressed until the given information reach saturated stage as the given answer by the informant with another informant are the same and there is no more differences of the other providing information among the informants (Abdul Hafiz, 2004). Among interview questions scope are as below:

- a) What basic for the application of plants in Malay landscape design.
- b) What local plant that could extrude Islamic element in Malay landscape.
- c) How far the current Malay landscape could shape the surrounding that based on Islam.
- d) Are Malay landscape with Islamic base could be assimilate with socio-culture of local Malay community.

Data Collection:

Data analysis could be executed after all the collected information and data for this research are sufficient. All the acquired data through observation, interview, also note and others is collected. The informants will provide answers from their point of view and data from this interview will be collected until it reaches saturated level.

Data Analysis:

The acquired data and information analysis is analysed by using the assistance of *N-VIVO* software. Observation on research base also analysis result from *N-VIVO* software is viewed together to obtain research result. Writing of printed materials or library reference is utilised to offer consolidation or security to the researcher's fact to explain the discussed issue

Research Findings and Discussion:

The occurrence of assimilation process in Malay society after Islam presence provides huge impact to daily life till Malay and Islam could not be part which there is a degree someone said that if an individual entering Islam, then that person has joining into the Malay race (Osman, 1989). Nowadays, most society has realise, also could differentiate Malay as a race and Islam as religion. The close compatibility between Islam and also Malay

make everything relating to Malay society's daily life are mostly influenced by Islam teachings and it is included also in Malay landscape.

In context of landscape in presence of Islamic element, paradise's garden image often utilised to convey the concept of landscape with Islamic element. Heaven is symbolised as an area that include a space advantage, where there are plants, floral, fruits and also animal. As seen in plant organisation in Malay society' house area, there are several same speculation as gardens that are visualised in heaven as all of it have certain function that are beneficial for their daily life. For example, most of the plant cultivate in Malay landscape are fruit trees, herbs or medicines, for kitchen basics and others that are beneficial and advantageous. This matter is meant in Quran in surah Ali-Imran which is translated as below:

"...those who remember Allah (always, and in prayers) standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying): Our Lord! You have not created (all) this without purpose, glory to You! (Exalted be You above all that they associate with You as partners). Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire." (Surah Ali-Imran: 191).

"It is He Who sends down water (rain) from the sky, and with it We bring forth vegetation of all kinds, and out of it We bring forth green stalks, from which We bring forth thick clustered grain. And out of the date palm and its spate come forth clusters of dates hanging low and near, and gardens of grapes, olives and pomegranates, each similar (in kind) yet different (in variety and taste). Look at their fruits when they begin to bear, and the ripeness thereof. Verily! In these things there are signs for people who believe." (Surah Al-An'am: 99).

Some of society thought that Islam did not care about the beauty for there is no basis in Quran and also as-sunnah about it. The truth is the Islam itself already too beautiful because Allah is too beautiful and He loves beauty and it is said in hadith that a human duty on earth, one of them is to beautify the earth (Fatos, 2011).

"Allah is indeed beautiful and He loves the beauty." (Hadith riwayat Muslim).

Allah s.w.t.'s mighty can be seen through His creations' beauty so that every creature bow to this one and only creator. It is however, stated in surah An-Naml as below:

"Is not He (better than your gods) Who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you water (rain) from the sky, whereby We cause to grow wonderful gardens full of beauty and delight? It is not in your ability to cause the growth of their trees. Is there any ilâh (god) with Allah? Nay, but they are a people who ascribe equals (to Him)!" (Surah An-Naml: 60).

It is understandable that the beauty not only beautiful and delicious to one's sight, but it also contain hidden meanings. Islam's beauty could be seen in the way Muslims celebrates guests to their home, and in landscape context, Malay society usually cultivate beautiful and bright colour flowers around their home to bring out 'sense of welcoming' (Abdullah Sani, A., personal communication, December 12, 2012). The sentence of *"Whereby We cause to grow wonderful gardens full of beauty and delight? It is not in your ability to cause the growth of their trees"* clearly shows beautiful expression carries the soul composed meaning besides it cool the eyes whose seen it. Besides that, Allah s.w.t also said that:

"And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water (rain) on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth)." (Surah Al-Hajj: 5).

This verse also had clearly state that plants and crops are significant elements in existing the beauty of this earth. Thus, we can see here how the connection of the flora was utilized to produce the image of beauty not only in heaven but also on earth. So does flowers that produce good fragrant are mostly plant in Malay landscape also symbolise Islamic elements (Abdullah Sani, A., personal communication, December 12, 2012). There is a saying that roses fragrant are Prophet Muhammad s.a.w's odour and the symbol of beauty (Fatos, 2011). Along with Islamic teachings that encourage the Muslims to wear fresh or fragrant odour, Malay society's culture also love to cultivate plant that produce fragrant plant, not only for celebrating the guest but also as perfume for ladies, which is putting flowers in their hair. Among the fragrant plants are *kesidang* plant (*Canarium scortechinii*), jasmine, *kemuning* (*Murraya paniculata*, commonly called *Orange Jessamine*), *cempaka* (*Gardenia spp.*) and others. The suitability from application of the fragrant smell aspect could be value with paradise visual which is also said has fragrant odour. Imam Ibnu Qayyim r.a wrote that:

"It is true Allah had shown to His followers of this world some effect reflecting paradise's characteristic, for example fragrant and delicious smell, cool, beautiful scenery, good quality fruits, all the heavenly joy and leisure."

Malay cultures of love to give present when the guest come are one of the custom symbol of how they serve their guest with full of kindness and polite. Islam also asking its followers to serve the guest with full of custom and polite and providing gift is assumed as alms or charity. Besides that, Malay society culture concept of love to help could be seen in Malay landscape context. The floras that were planted around the house were also shared with close neighbours (Nur Huzeima & Byrd, 2012). As it is quoted in Quran:

“O! You who believe! Spend of the good things which you have (legally) earned, and of that which We have produced from the earth for you, and do not aim at that which is bad to spend from it, (though) you would not accept it save if you close your eyes and tolerate therein. And know that Allah is Rich (Free of all wants), and Worthy of all praise.” (Surah Al-Baqarah: 267).

Fruit plant cultivation is also an essential in Malay landscape in which not only pretend as food source also as an alternative to provide present for guest that come to their house. Interview results also explain the same situation as example of informant give opinion as below:

“Why are there beneficial plants were cultivated around the house? For example fruits, vegetables and others? Did we realise that if we go to villages, as we on the way home, the villagers will give us present, and the tie of present is a symbol. In Islam, present is one of alms or gift. The given present usually something that exists around their house such as fruit that was taken from the cultivated trees at their house. It is the identification of Islamic element in Malay landscape.” (Ismail, S., personal communication, December 4, 2012).

It is state as in hadith, which was narrated by Anas bin Malik r.a, Rasulullah s.a.w says:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَا مِنْ مُسْلِمٍ يَغْرِسُ غَرْسًا أَوْ يَزْرِعُ زَرْعًا قَبْلُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ مِنْهُ طَيْرٌ أَوْ إِنْسَانٌ أَوْ بَهِيمَةٌ إِلَّا كَانَ لَهُ بِهِ صَدَقَةٌ
“Not a Muslim cultivates a tree or plants with a type of plant, but then it was eaten by birds, human or livestock, except it will be charity to him/her”.

Concept of Malay landscape in its basic function is not allowing any waste. It is proved every plant were cultivated have their own function, directly or indirectly. For example, application of the cultivated *pandan* leaves is not limited only for a function, but much more such as cake's fragrant extract, cake colouring and also as flower mixture for wedding ceremony, *berzanji* (a type of song to praise Prophet Muhammad), and completion of Quran. It proves that wasting concept is not practice as what was prohibited in Islam. Allah had said that which is translated as:

“Verily, spendthrifts are brothers of the Satan (devils), and the Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.” (Surah Al-Isra: 27).

It is understandable that Allah forbids His followers from doing any waste. It is practically align in Malay landscape, in which every plant cultivated has its own value or functions. It is as what was said by respondent a below:

“Malay landscape is about functional and practical thing. Think it as a routine, daily need.” (Ismail, S., personal communication, December 4, 2012).

Malaysia position at tropical area indicates that most of the plants are green. It is an advantage for Malay landscape which most of the plants are green. From colour application aspect, Malay landscapes are rich with green plants. What can be seen from aspect of compatibility of Malay landscape with Islam as what was said in hadith green is also Rasulullah's favourite colour.

“Colour that Rasulullah s.a.w like the most is Green.”

Nevertheless, Rasulullah s.a.w also clearly loves white. There are also statements Rasulullah s.a.w did wore clothes of black, heart of red, grey and mix colour.

“From colour aspect, it is not necessarily green colour. Rasulullah has variety colour of clothes. It is just that his favourite colour is green. He likes green colour because, in desert there are not much green”. (Mohd Tajuddin, R., December 5, 2012).

"If green colour, we have tons of it in Malaysia. Majority of flora here are green. But, I don't think it's should be specific colours. When Allah created tropical trees, He created very few colours, because to create colours it takes the plant to a certain huge of lights." (Ismail, S., personal communication, December 4, 2012).

It could be seen here that there is no permanent colour specification in visualising colour for plant selection in Malay landscape (Mohd Tajuddin, R., December 5, 2012). Compatibility of Malay landscape with Islamic elements not only could be seen from external perspective, but also from 'spirit of the thing' aspect (Ismawi, Z., personal communication, December 7, 2012). It involves aspect of function of a cultivated plant for its better utility. In additional Malay society are more comfortable with 'rustic environment' or in another word environment that are more natural. In Allah s.a.w quote:

رَبُّدَالِقَا مُه لَعَلَّوَاوَا لَمَّا بَتَوَلَّيْدَ نَنْدُجِي لَ رَهْلَا بَظَلَا يَوْفِيَايَ

"It is only those who believe not in the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allah, who fabricate falsehood, and it is they who are liars." (Surah Al-Nahl: 105).

Environment and the cultivated plants in Malay landscape are more toward nature (Nur Huzeima & Byrd, 2012). It not only includes plants, but also includes animals which make the plants as their food source. It can be found in Malay's verse, *gurindam* (two lines of poem as advice and lesson or teaching to the natives) or poetry that also that has relevance of wild animal. This matter was mentioned by informant, as below:

"There was quoted in Quran that plants also had connection with wild animals. Wild animal exist in Malay landscape because it is vital. In poems and Malay tale, the mention of wild animal usage does exist." (Abdullah Sani, A., personal communication, December 12, 2012).

Referring to informant, in applying landscape concept of Islamic element, plants utility not only focus on plants used at Middle East like date palm, but plants in the surrounding that able to, especially reflect Malay society's identity. It is parallel with Islamic element that concern about justice concept in positioning the whereabouts of plants to be cultivated and not creating fake environment just like Wright statement (1949):

"The truth is we need originality more than it was ever needed to make good our claim to democratic freedom. Why can't we be honest about it? If one must steal it-steal it. Take it straight! Why fake it and spoil it?"

The respondent also insists about this matter, as below:

"I don't think that we need to create fake environment. It just likes what happen to Kota Bharu. It is like forcing these people to live in fake situation. Why didn't we cultivate jasmine, plumeria, 'bunga tanjung' (Mimosops elengi) or bidara, (Ziziphus mauritiana)? It is not wrong to plant these plants." (Ismawi, Z., personal communication, December 7, 2012).

The usage of date palm is not necessarily used in visualizing Islamic elements in the landscape (Fatos, 2011). As what can be seen in Kota Bharu city, the usage of date palm is one of the symbols utilised to deliver landscape concept of Islamic element. In Islam art, there is no species or certain type of palm could be symbolised in paradise in context of plants cultivation (Fatos, 2011). However in Quran, it is repeatedly mention about date fruit goodness, it does not mean the usage of date palm is an essential to visualise Islamic element (Ismail, Z., personal communication, December 7, 2012). This was firmly asserted by the fourth informant:

"If you look at that plant (date palm), its functionall wise, it should bear fruit right? And since we are in the tropic and we don't have 12 or 16 hours long day light. In order for date palm, to produce fruit, they need 16 hours/day light. If the plant didn't produce fruit and doesn't serve people, to me it's not Islamic". (Ismail, Z., personal communication, December 7, 2012).

All the informants do not agree of date palm usage as the symbol of Islamic image in Malay landscape in Kota Bharu. It is just like the informant has insisted on in interview result, as below:

"All plants have their particular goodness. But that (date palm)is coincidentally mention in Quran. As if another plants is not a gift from God. The plants here (Malaysia) are one of Allah's gift that He give to us, and these plants are appropriate with weather and climate here." (Abdullah Sani, A., personal communication, December 12, 2012).

This matter was also mention in Quran, as below:

“Who has made earth for you like a bed (spread out); and has opened roads (ways and paths etc.) for you therein; and has sent down water (rain) from the sky. And We have brought forth with it various kinds of vegetation. Eat and pasture your cattle, (therein); verily, in this are proofs and signs for men of understanding.” (Surah Ta-Ha: 54).

The quote above clearly shows that flora application not only focuses on either date palm usage nor plants from Middle East to create landscape of Islamic image. Concept of plants application in Malay landscape of varies function shows that compatibility in shaping Islamic image does exist. Islam prioritises the functions either from aspect of fruits, the fragrant or for shading or the aesthetics or all of them.

Conclusion:

Islam assimilation process that occurs in Malay society had mostly change the pattern of Malay society's way of life. This matter is also not a foreign in Malay landscape itself, which there is adaptation practised according to Islam teaching itself directly or indirectly. Combination between Islam teachings and Malay culture itself makes landscape application in Malay society provides benefits to the users directly.

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