



The Analysis of Socio Culture and Economic Influence towards Malay Community of the Architecture of Masjid Jamek

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to convey some of the analytical studies about the impact and influence of the architecture of Masjid Jamek towards important elements; socio culture and economic activities of Malay community at Malaysia. With the advancement and rapid progressive at Kuala Lumpur nowadays and towards its vision to be the world-class city it is very important for use to ponder and reevaluate the contribution of the 'historical' building before we can step forward and 'open a new leaf' or our future mission. Therefore, hopefully, this paper can be a starting point and good for the Malaysian citizen to bear in their mind and then realize that we most appreciate the past before we can generate our effort by heart and soul to archive the future ambition.

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Introduction of Architecture, culture and economy:

Francis, D.K. Ching in his book 'Architecture- Form, Space and Order' had defined the term of architecture as conceived – designed – and realizes- built – in response to an existing set of conditions. These conditions may also reflect in varying degrees the social, political and economic climate. The act of creating architecture, then a problem solving and design process, which will give a big implication towards the built environment.

Refer to the 'Collin's Dictionary and Thesaurus' edited by William. T.McLeod, the culture had been interpreted as the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action while the economy is the complex of activities undertaken for profit and concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. In the other word, the culture and economy is two major elements which had given a big significance in terms of the lifestyle and modus operandi of the society in a certain place or environment.

From the previous interpretation, it shows that the architecture actually is not just about the idea of the structural design but more that, it also the environment and 'human design' too. The culture and economy establish its identity by the interaction between the collective intelligence and the environment of that society – in-built. Therefore, the relationship between the architecture, economy and culture is very close and this paper will try to discuss this relationship in perspective of Masjid Jamek's architecture towards Malay community in Malaysia.

The culture of Malay in Malaysia:

Malaysia is a country rich in culture, being a country with migration of the Chinese and Indians in the early days, the fusion of the culture has occurred in Malaysia. The Malay in Malaysian's largest ethnic group, accounting for over half the population and the national language. With the oldest indigenous peoples they form a citizenship, which translates as "sons" or "princes of the soil". Almost all Malaysian are Muslims and Islam had been declared as an official religion.

Currently comprising roughly half the 22 million Malaysian population, the Malay people can be found virtually everywhere in the country. In urban centers they are pervasive in all industries and business. In the countryside the Malay population is even more omnipresent, their villages or "Kampungs" are scattered far and wide all across the Peninsula.

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The Malay Kampung is a reflection of the Malay people, easy – going, warm and accommodating. The Kampung is usually a homely and serene setting where everybody knows everybody and all member pitch and contribute to their community. Traditionally, the Malay culture has always been intrinsically linked by a love of land a strongly devout belief in Islam. Thusly social norms or the “adat” of the Malay peoples emphasize good manner, family ties, tolerance and goodwill.

Being muslim, the Malay culture is a blend of traditional values, religion adherences and a modern outlook that has served to instill the Malays with piety principles.

The Relationship History of Kuala Lumpur and Masjid Jamek:

Kuala Lumpur’s story dates back to the 1820’s when Malays, mainly Sumatrans crosses the Straits of Melaka to conquer the thick virgin jungle in search of a new life. Their paddled up the Klang River and settled on the upper reaches of the river. We hear of such early Malay settlement in area like Petaling about 17km from the city centre and a village called Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukum close to Jalan Bangsar about 12km from the city centre. These early settlers supplemented their meager from paddy and panning for tin at streams nearby. The Klang – Gombak junction, close to where Masjid Jamek is now situated, was the point for loading tin ingots and unloading of food supplies, weapons, shovels, pans, and more immigrants to man the mines.

Kuala Lumpur came into being in the late 1860s when a band of prospectors In search of tin landed at the meeting point of the Klang and Gombak rivers and imaginatively named the place Kuala Lumpur – ‘Muddy Convergence’.

The History of Masjid Jamek:

This is the city’s oldest surviving mosque, located at the confluence of the Sungai Klang and Sungai Gombak. It is one of the most photographed buildings in the country. The mosque was designed by A.B Hubback a government architecture who was also responsibility for other notable designs during period. The money raised by subscription from the Malay community and Government funds. Jamek Mosque was constructed on the site of the first Malay cemetery and was officially opened by 1909 in the presence of large group of Malays from all over the state.

The design was inspired by Mogul mosque in North India. Cupolas and minarets top the brick walls and arched colonnades. Three domes surmount the prayer hall; the central dome is 21.3m (70 ft) high and is flanked by two lower domes. The prayer hall opens out into a walled sahn (courtyard), which has now been covered over. At the corners are two red and white striped minarets 26-8 (88 ft) high, identical in design with chatris (umbrella – shaped cupolas, usually domed and open- sided) on the top. A large number of small chatris top entrance and corner of the mosque. Curved steps lead to the water’s edge.

Until the opening of the National Mosque in 1965, Masjid Jamek served as Kuala Lumpur’s principle mosque. In 1979, RM 4 million was spent to renovate and refurbish the mosque.

The Influence of Socio Culture and Economy:

It stands as prominent symbols of the country’s religious history. As in custom for Muslims, a call to prayer occurs five times a day, and many Malays break their workday at each calling. Emanating from the mosques at these time what is known as the “azan”, a sing- song chant – sung by the ‘muezzin’ – that echoes over the area.

This phenomenon actually had created a unique identity at the area. This culture gradually becomes an attraction to the tourist from the foreigner to become and visit the area. It means that although the Malay is busy the economic activities and work at the surrounding are, at the certain time, they will take a break to accomplish their obligation; to perform the prayer.

This culture becomes so clear especially during Friday when the traffic at the area will become massive because most of the citizens want to go to the Masjid Jamek to perform their solat.

In other hand, the eco of ‘azan’ and sometime, the reading Al-Quran in that area actually had given some identification about socio – culture of Malay as a dominant race in Malaysia at that area. As we had discusses before, the culture of Malay has always been intrinsically linked by a strongly devout belief in Islam.

From the foregoing discussion about Malay culture too, the Malay is very sensitive about their food and they just eat the Halal food. This situation and culture had encouraged the growth of many types of Malay food stalls and shops at the area. Indirectly, the existence of Masjid Jamek at the area as a worship place for most if the Muslim had given an income and job opportunity to the Malay.

Beside, the reputation of Masjid Jamek as a landmark of Kuala Lumpur also had given a big implication toward socio culture and economic of Malay community. The Tourist Development Corporation showed that almost 2 million tourist visit this Kuala Lumpur every year. The incoming tourist made the streets become so busy and this opportunity had been used by the Malay to open their business along the streets. There are so many types of stuffs that sold there. For instance, Jalan Masjid India become very famous among the tourists to buy souvenirs and most of the shops and stalls there owned by the Malay.

More than, the existence of Masjid Jamek at the hub of Kuala Lumpur had given a big significant in term of culture of the architecture at that area. Indirectly, the survival of Masjid Jamek had become a symbol of colonial architecture and at the same time, the variety of architecture style at Kuala Lumpur. As the Tourism Malaysia literature says “to get from 20th century to the 18th century, just cross the street”. The street here means the whole street at the Merdeka Square area.

If we looked at the existence of Masjid Jamek in context of Islamic city and Islamic architecture, the mosque had become a centre of all the activities. This argument based on the meaning of Surah Al – Jumaah phase 9 which encouraged their followers to ‘run’ for their daily and duties after performing their task; their prayer. Therefore, the existence of the mosque, inevitably, had become a symbol of Kuala Lumpur as Islamic city. Maybe this statement can be discussed further with so many argumentation but in perspective of the survival of the Masjid Jamek maybe this statement can be accepted for a while.

For the Malay, the Masjid Jamek is a “spirit” of muslim citizen at Kuala Lumpur. Although there are a lot of new landmark of mosque, Putrajaya Mosque and also National Mosque but still cannot against the ‘superior’ of Masjid Jamek as the survival mosque for long time period. For the Malay, the Masjid Jamek is a ‘witness’ of the evolution of Kuala Lumpur from a small city based on mining activities until today as a mega city which served the latest technology and become the world business venture.

Although the Masjid Jamek had been designed by the foreigner architecture but actually the Malay is a ‘real’ architect of the mosque, they had given the ‘soul’ of the mosque and also the environment around the place from time by time. They served for the mosque and given the big gratitude towards it.

In a nutshell, the existence of Masjid Jamek had given a big implication in term of evolution of the social – culture and economic activities of the Malay at Kuala Lumpur city.

Conclusion:

From all the foregoing points and arguments, the Masjid Jamek had contributed so much benefits to the Malay in terms of social and economical improvement. This contribution must be appreciated and awarded by give a high recognition to the mosque as the oldest survival mosque at Kuala Lumpur.

Nowadays, the progressive and aggressive development of Kuala Lumpur had threatened the structural composite of the Masjid Jamek. For instance, the construction of LRT at the nearby of the mosque can cause the river flooded. This situation can ruin the structural ability of the mosque at anytime. The responsible authority must nip in the bud of this trouble and take an instant action before it become more complicated.

As person who had done a little bit of researches and studies about Masjid Jamek, I totally argued to demolish the mosque. It is our task and obligation to preserve it and improve its function from time to time. Nothing can reply the ‘spirit’ of the mosque although it had been reconstructed at another place. Maybe, the incentive of the government to spend about 4 million in 1979 for the renovation and refurbishment of the mosque is the best example of the society commitment at the period to look at the Masjid Jamek is not an ordinary worship place.

However, it is better to ponder for a while with the statement which had been wrote by Azhar Zainal Abidin in Architecture Malaysia [3] ‘..... there is no doubt that contemporary mosque design In Malaysia serves its purpose for prayer and religious and social enhancement. But more importantly, this has come out about not because of the mosque design themselves, but by the effort of the people using and running them. No mosque can function without congregation, and their needs, aspirations and critical evaluation are reflection of their place in a progressive society’.

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