

Malay Cultural Responsive Landscape: Inspiration for Design Emotion in Modern Landscape Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Scholars determines that man cannot exist independently and must cherish the relationship binding him with the rest. This relationship is expressed usually by the landscape in which we live. This statement supports the landscape evolution which has started during the Romanticism Movement. This movement is fundamentally the awakening point in environmental consciousness. It was developed during the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century where at that time, researchers have established provision of new scientific ideas that made possible a new perspective in rational comprehension, as opposed to the spontaneous enjoyment of the landscape. From this moment, people start to recognize that there was a variety of landscape characters that determined its categories. One of it is known as cultural landscape. Cultural landscape however, being generously replaced by modernism and heterogeneous characteristics. This paper discusses the importance of the Malay cultural landscape in bringing people close to their living environment and feeling the sense of belonging towards their outdoor spaces. Information elaborated in this paper is an inspiration for current landscape architects who seem to focus more on design form and elements; rather than functional spatial design and space emotion.

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INTRODUCTION

The Malay cultural responsive landscape is unique as it can be understood not only from literature, but also through the cultural impression of the community. This includes the traditional Malay folk stories, *pantun* and *seloka* and wood carving that evidently justify their intimate relationship with the environment. As an example, one such tale is *Batu belah Batu Bertangkup*. In this folk story, a pregnant mother yearned to eat the roes of a particular fish which she finally caught. After cooking, she saved the dish to be eaten after her work in the field. When she returned, to her dismay she found that her two young children had eaten the dish. In her distraught, she rushed into the forest and killed herself by being crushed in between a split boulder. The piece of boulder was split open upon her frantic request and the desire to end her life.

This story tells us that the Malays traditionally and especially before the arrival of Islam were animistic in their belief. Their lives were closely inter twinned with nature for sustenance as well as for the spiritual and emotional comfort. They respect the natural world of the seen as well as the unseen. With the advent of Islam most of the animistic beliefs of the Malays have been discarded. However, the awe that the Malays have toward the forest or the river, the sea or the mountain is still a reminiscence of their ancestral beliefs. These beliefs have helped them survive the hostile environment they had evolved from and acquire a great deal of knowledge and understanding about their natural surrounding which has been handed down from generation to generation.

Binding Nature Through The Malay Traditional Art :

The intimate relationship that exists between the traditional Malay and his surroundings is also evident in their aesthetic expression in the form of *Pantun* and *Seloka*. These short poetic rhymes employ what is available in nature to add color to the delivery of an advice or a message. The *pantun* normally comprises four lines. The first two lines act as the descriptive container or carrier of the next two lines that carry the message. Normally,

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the intimate symbiotic connection with nature influences the first two opening lines. For instance, five examples of *Pantun* are presented below [3];

<i>Malam ini merendang jagung,</i>	Tonight the maize for roasting's set,
<i>Malam ini merendang Serai.</i>	Tomorrow it is a lemon grass.
<i>Malam ini kita berkampung,</i>	Tonight we are together,
<i>Malam esok kita bercerai.</i>	Tomorrow on our way we pass.
<i>Pucuk pauh, delima batu,</i>	A ruby and a mango shoot,
<i>Anak sembilang di tapak tangan.</i>	A tiny catfish on my palm!
<i>Sungguh jauh, negeri satu,</i>	The world is one, though far to boot
<i>Hilang di mata di hati jangan.</i>	When out of sight, keep memory warm.
<i>Pulau Pandan jauh ketengah,</i>	Where Pandan isle's lies out at sea
<i>Gunung Daik bercabang tiga.</i>	Gunung Daik has triple shoulders.
<i>Hancur badan dikandung tanah,</i>	When wrapt in earth the body moulders
<i>Budi yang baik dikenang juga.</i>	Kind acts will still remembered me.
<i>Penatlah saya menanam padi,</i>	With planting rice I am weary grown,
<i>Nanas juga ditanam orang.</i>	When others raise a crop of pines.
<i>Penatlah saya menanam budi,</i>	Though seeds of kindness of I have sown
<i>Emas juga dipandang orang.</i>	In sight of man, this gold that shines.
<i>Limau purut, limau lelang,</i>	Wild citrus fruits, of varied types
<i>Masak di tepi Pengkalan Rama.</i>	Ripens besides Rama Landing.
<i>Harimau mati tinggalkan belang</i>	While tigers leave behind their stripes
<i>Orang mati tinggalkan nama</i>	Dead men leave a name outstanding.

Source: Hamilton [3]

The panoramic view of the sunrise or sunset over an open rice field, the gentle breeze rustling through the bamboo grove or the cacophony orchestra of birds and animal life at the break of day evokes an aesthetic imagery in the minds of the Malay village and has been a part and parcel of their lives. Their arts and handicrafts reflect these feelings that are evoked by nature. The innate design of the shapes of the papaya leaves, or the patterns found in the flora and fauna of the natural environment fond expressions are reflected in the art and craft forms.

Malay woodcarving is another example of nature that influences the intrinsic value of the Malay culture. Ismail *et al* [4] in his research describes woodcarving as the outstanding craft of the Malays depicting their keenness for beauty and sharp observation toward the natural surrounding. It is an art whereby a piece of hardwood timber is incised or cut using sharp tools and later the cut material is removed. The incision or cut follows certain patterns that are drawn in pencil on the timber board or plank. The pattern conforms to six types of motives ranging from the flora to calligraphy. Most of the carvings in vernacular houses in the Peninsular Malaysia are done in the flora motives signifying the obedience of the craftsmen towards their Islamic faith and love towards nature. The beauty of the flora forms, flowers and leaves become the source of inspiration and is later manifested into carving patterns. Examples of the flora and fauna derived from the garden and the village compound that influence the motif of woodcarving is presented in Figure 1.0 and 2.0.

In addition to the woodcarving, traditional crafts such as *Mengkuang* weavings and textile designs of *Batek* and *Songket* weavings employ innate design motives which are reflective of their natural surrounding elements. Bright warm colors and bold design patterns pay tribute to the splendor of the tropical landscape. Malay poets, writers and artists have sung and danced, painted and acted out in praise of the beauty and harmonious presence of the Malay village landscape. The art of kite making and top spinning, the game of *Sepak Takraw* and *Congkak* are kept alive by young and old alike as an undying cultural heritage that has been the products of their cultural landscape. The traditional Malays were by nature a very creatively sensitive groups of people. They were naturally in tune with the rhythm of their surroundings. Their sensitivity was innate as opposed to something that is being adopted or imported from an outside culture.



Fig. 1.0: Flora and fauna motives in the Malay woodcarving.

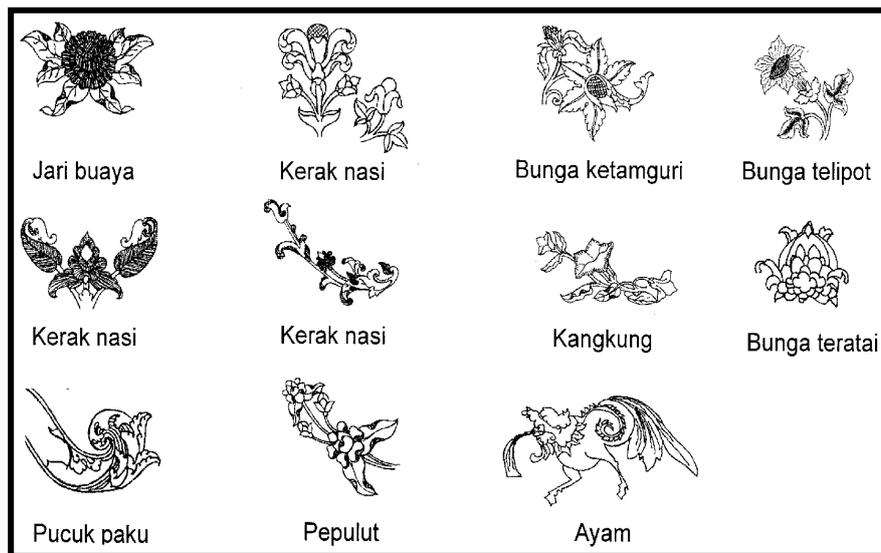


Fig. 2.0: Samples of motifs of flora and fauna in Malay woodcarving.

The Traditional Malay Garden Inspiration:

The historical evidence of interaction of the Malays with the landscape is also documented in *Bustan Al-Salatin* which describes Sultan Iskandar Thani who had built a beautiful garden named *Taman Ghairah* (Pleasurable Garden). In this garden, there was a river named *Dar – Al Isyki*, a hill named *Gegunungan Menara Permata* and the King's burial ground was sited at the side of the hill. There was a royal seat built from stone named *Kembang Senja Berkerawang*. Both sides of the river were accommodated with royal hall and a beautiful lake full with flower blooms named *Kolam Jentera Hati*. The book also identifies 56 flowering plants inclusive of cempaka (*Michelia champaka*), kenanga (*Cananga odorata*) and jasmine (*Jasminium sambac*) besides 44 numbers of fruit plants inclusive of durian (*Durio zibethinus*), rambutan (*Nepheliun lappaceum*), pomegranate (*Punica granatum*), and banana (*Musa paradisica*). The record has justified the importance of garden in the Malay community that was also emphasized and practised by the royals and possibly the aristocrats as well. Selected plant species in the garden are basically intrinsic not only for the aesthetic, but also the functional aspects such as to provide food, cosmetic, and medicinal values. Having river, lake and hill can also be the evidence for the interaction between garden and nature.

The garden is a source of pride to the Malay household collectively. It is the front piece where everyone pitches in to promote the inner beauty of the resident within. They believe the garden to be a mirror of themselves, a reflection of sensual and personal experience [1]. The Malays believe that the number of the types of flowers available in the garden represent the number of virgin ladies belonging to the residence [7]. Complexity of planting composition in the garden also reflects the skillful, artistic and sublime beauty of the ladies themselves thus making them desirable wives to be sought after [6]. Hence, it is not an uncommon phenomenon that a sense of competitiveness prevails on whose garden is the more beautiful amongst neighbors.

The Malay garden is part and parcel of its surrounding natural environment; it is a refinement of what was wild at one time. Spatial and substance organized in the garden produce a place that makes sense of the world around them and is naturally designed to present their understanding and satisfaction about nature in their individual territory. It becomes a space for all purposes and gives a sense of pride to be part of and to share with the community.

With the introduction of Islam into their lives, the traditional Malays found their true identity. Their perception of nature was no more governed by animism alone. Islam as a religion has influenced the composition of the Malay responsive cultural landscape subtly but with added grace and depth of the beauty. The garden was created in reverence to the creator. The spirit of nature answers to man, the caliphate, the warden and the caretaker of his environment. The Malay garden reaches beyond the depth faith and it was expressed no more in fears of the unknown but in the worship of the one expressed in all his splendors within and without this universe. The sacredness of the garden is embodied in the fact that the Malay house and its surrounding is nurtured and cared for. Allah's beauty is in every flower and every voice of the birds or rain flows on the attap roof or the sublime feeling when the mind beholds the beauty of nature and the fruit trees – Allah is in all and all represents beauty.

Emotion In The Modern Garden Design:

The importance of garden for the human being is universally recognized. Francis [2] observes the garden as a subconscious expression or a conscious concretion of an order that is important to us. Uncovering the natural order is the key to the meaning of the garden. Understanding of the order is essential to the creation of a meaningful garden. Since the garden is an expression of faith, personal beliefs, cultural values and power, it can also play a restorative role in people's lives. The garden is a place we often go to when we are sick, depressed or in need of inspiration.

Kaplan and Kaplan [5] summarize their findings from their extensive research on the psychological benefits of the gardening, plant and wilderness into a theory of garden as a restorative experience. In the discussion, they divide the functional aspects of the garden in three factors. The first relates to the tangible benefits of the garden such as cutting cost and harvesting. This understanding is closely related to the development of a traditional Malay garden, where the garden is basically functioning to sustain the residents [7]. It is mainly to support the economical values by providing food to be consumed by the family and to be shared with the communities. Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) is one of the most important plants for the economical values of the Malays. It has been referred as a multipurpose plant which provides not only food, but also the medicinal, cosmetic and spiritual values. In fact, harvesting seasonal fruit trees such as rambutan (*Nephelium lappaceum*) in the house compound of the resident becomes one of the most interesting events in the family.

The second factor is what they call primary garden experiences where the desire to work in the soil and see things grow. Referring this statements with the evolution of a Malay garden can be understood where the Malays practicing Islam believe that garden, consisting of plants and animals such as birds is praying to Allah the Almighty at all time. By having them close to their residents, they feel more secured and close to Allah. Witnessing the growth of plants and benefiting from them and experiencing their beauty are basically reminding them towards the blessing of Allah. Besides that, plants and garden are essential in the culture of the Malay community. They are the outcome of human expression and indicate human relationship with the rest of the living environment. Plant offers many opportunities for enjoyment of the aesthetic delights of both cultivated and wild plants. The sight, scent and sensation of flowers, foliage and fruits, even the sound of wind and rain in the branches of trees, shrubs and other plants, can immeasurably add the quality of people's daily life.

Kaplan and Kaplan [5] suggest that sustained interest is part of the experience, including people seeing the garden as a valuable way to spend time and divert from their routine. The cultural responsive landscape in a Malay garden evidently contributes towards the purpose of a garden as one of the most important areas for residents to spend their leisure time. Availability of fruit trees and flowering shrubs embellishes the setting supporting the leisure activities. The garden is basically the playground of the children, a relaxing area for the adults and a place to get together with their neighbors. In certain events such as the wedding ceremony, the garden will be utilized as an extension of the house. As an example, the area that is close to the kitchen will be utilized as a food preparation area such as cooking, whereas the front area is basically used for gathering or parking spaces.

To the Malays, the home garden reflects a sense of pride and understanding living in harmony with nature. The importance of plants in the culture of a Malay community is evidently justified when the Malays appreciate each of the parts of the plants harmoniously with the parts of the body in human being. This attributes inherent physically as well as spiritually. As an example, each part of the plant from the roots to the seeds and flowers are endowed with a healing property to the human body and its equivalent part and organs. For instance, leaves of *Jatropha curcas* are believed to heal wounds. Likewise, parasite plant, which depends on other plants to live, is believed to be good plants to be used as talisman for protection and to achieve a wish. This is an analogy of a plant that succeeds to live in harsh condition. However, this traditional beliefs are not practised anymore by the modern Malay community. The medical doctor would advise suitable health treatment to them.

As in the human counterparts, plants are also endowed with negative elements and used for negative effects. Their characters similarly reflect negative values such as spiky and poisonous. The *pokok celaka* is fond of inducing abortion or miscarriage. This plant is identified to be potentially dangerous to human physical as well as spiritual health and is never used for cooking purposes.

On the other hand, plants that have pleasant aroma such as the pandan (*Pandanus odoratus*) leaves and various flowers such as Jasmine (*Jasminium sambac*) and kenanga (*Cananga odorata*) are planted for their cosmetic values. The henna plants (*Lawsonia inermis*) is a popular plant used for its coloring properties. A Malay bride never appears without her crimson colored palm and fingers on her wedding day [7]. In short, it is believed that the Malay garden does not only function to fulfill the physical needs of the residents such as the economic values, but also caters for the needs of their spiritual beliefs.

In conclusion, this paper determines the three factors of garden quality as a restorative landscape; a landscape that is not meant only for their physical beauties, but contains art, emotion and functional values in them. Restorative Malay garden provide economical values, create an experience and a valuable place to spend time and divert from the routine. These characteristics are considered as important factors in bringing people close to their living environment and feeling the sense of g towards their outdoor spaces. Information elaborated in this paper is an inspiration for current landscape architects who seem to focus more on design form and elements; rather than functional spatial design and space emotion.

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