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Cultural Heritage Tourism: Kapitan Keling mosque as a focal point & symbolic identity for Indian muslim in Penang

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Abstract

This study has identified a cultural heritage product of the Indian Muslim community that has contributed significantly to the tourism industry in Penang, namely Kapitan Keling Mosque. The study also shows that the Kapitan Keling Mosque highlights the strength of ethnic identity and sustainability of the India Muslim heritage especially for the purpose of 'tourist gaze'. This research is an ethnographic research, using qualitative methods. The results showed that the cultural heritage of Indian Muslim community has become a product of 'tourist gaze' and has confirmed that; the Kapitan Keling Mosque is now the main symbol and focal center in the improvement of the social and life force of the community in Georgetown.

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Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism; Kapitan Keling mosque; Indian muslim; tourist gaze

1. Introduction

The two historical cities in Malaysia, namely Penang and Malacca, are inscribed as UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Sites in Malaysia (Ismail, 2012). In conjunction with the recognition, this study is focused on the well-known capital of Penang, called Georgetown.

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Previously, George Town was a trading port that had brought a large number of traders from the northern region of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, India, China, and Arab. This phenomenon had created a multicultural dimension that unites the people from various cultural backgrounds. Inter-marriage between immigrants and local people had resulted in a cultural hybrid (i.e., Jawi Peranakan, Baba Nyonya, and Indian Muslims) which reflect the lifestyle of local people (Shamsuddin, Sulaiman & Amat, 2012). Indian Muslim community is the largest community that migrated to Penang, had taken its root and had grown in Penang since Sir Francis Light controlled Penang in 1786 (Nagata, 2012). Most of the Indian Muslim community in the city of Georgetown was originally merchants, traders, and labourers. In a 2010 census by the statistics department in Malaysia, showed that the Indian Muslim's population has reached 78,702, from the total of 1,907,827 Indians in Malaysia. Meanwhile, the Indian Muslim population in Penang has reached 12,335 people, with a record of the second highest after the state of Selangor (Wan, 2012).

The Kapitan Keling Mosque is one of the hallmarks that play a role in the economic development, social and education for the Indian Muslim community in Penang. The Indian Muslim community at that time was rich and influential. Their position and wealth of the India Muslim individual causes many of them intermarried with the majority society in Malaysia, namely the Malays (Nagata, 2012). In fact, sometimes there is an ethnic identity conflict between the Indian Muslim community and Jawi Peranakan community themselves. If an Indian Muslim had mixed with the dominant Malay community through a marriage, he is known as a Jawi Peranakan. Due to this phenomenon, the Indian Muslim community in Penang through the India Muslim Community Association of Malaysia (IMCOM) organized the cultural heritage of India Muslim festival where various programs are presented, which include the Indian Muslim traditional costume, food, traditional games and mini-museums. These programs resulted in the formation of their culture and community. In addition, the efforts undertaken by the community are all based in Kapitan Keling Mosque. The Kapitan Keling Mosque has become a landmark for the surrounding communities and is now beginning to be known among the tourists. Hussain & Bet (2014) stated that the identification of a landmark is the recognition of its attributes and characteristics that influence an individual's thoughts. Landmarks may influence visitors' imagination and memory of the city. Each landmark portrays either one or more of the attributes that include proportion and size, colors, uniqueness, location or strategic position, point of reference, symbolism and architectural values.

Overall, these processes have caused some issues. Several questions are highlighted here, how ethnic identity has been integrated with the process to be performed and attract tourists to participate? Then, to provide the importance of Kapitan Keling Mosque in enhancing community development, thus produce the quality of life of the surrounding community. This study also examine on how ethnic identity is 'presented' to tourists and how the Indian Muslim community uses 'tourism' as a medium for them to present their cultural heritage, which aims not only to introduce their culture to tourists but has a stronger objective, 'to ensure that the Indian Muslim cultural heritage can be preserved and be proud by the younger generation'. This further reinforces that their perceived ethnic identity may be suffering from 'fading away' if awareness on their ethnic heritage is not emphasized. The involvements of India Muslim community not only affect the quality of life, but also strengthen their community identity.

1.1. Kapitan Keling Mosque

Kapitan Keling Mosque is located in the World Heritage Site, UNESCO, which became a universal valuable. The UNESCO World Heritage Sites is a site that includes natural features (forest, mountains, etc.) and man-made elements (monuments, buildings, cities, etc.). The values of the site must be universal and outstanding (Shamsuddin, et al., 2012). Kapitan Keling Mosque is the meeting point for the community to perform acts of worship equally and also the place for society to socialize and mingle with local people nearby. The concept of Moghul architecture of this mosque had been said looks like the Taj Mahal in India. Become the focus of local people, this mosque is also known as the Indian Muslim community mosque. Kapitan Keling Mosque was initially developed by a committee headed by Captain Kader Mohideen in 1802 and at one time has become the Penang State Mosque one time. However, although Kapitan Keling Mosque was no longer a state mosque, the design and architecture are still preserved as a cultural heritage and tourist gaze as cited by Hewison (1987) in the Urry

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