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Manifestation of Archipelagic Culture: How significant is it within the Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional architecture

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Abstract

Interpreting quality of life for the future generations to a certain extent is inexorably influenced by the knowledge of cultural and built heritage environment, signifying the people's way of life, their cultural identity. The qualitative research involved comprehensive historical literature search in identifying extent of cultural influence. This paper aims to present the literature review findings. Archipelagic culture of the Malays, traced back to the prehistory, mainly refers to the maritime Srivijaya kingdom, inseparably associated with Malay boats (*perahu*) was found manifested significantly in the visual representation of the roof shape, in naming the traditional architectural components and spaces.

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Keywords: Archipelagic culture; traditional architecture; matrilineal Malay; Srivijaya

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1. Introduction

The Nara Document of Authenticity 1994, stated, the heritage of all cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression. The physical (tangible) aspect of built environment is a form of a statement signifying the people's subsequently communities' way of life, a manifestation of the unique socio-cultural identity (Masri, 2012; Masri, 2013; Abdul Wahab et al., 2014) and values (Zakaria et al., 2014; El Husseiny & El Husseiny, 2012; Noviarti et al., 2012). Interpreting the "quality of life" in the built environment to a certain extent, is inexorably influenced by the knowledge of cultural and built heritage environment. Cultural aspects of place involved meanings related to the environment (Wan Ismail, 2013).

Malaysia is a Malay country, stemmed from the dynamic maritime civilization of the ancient Malay kingdoms is now a Malay country with a multicultural population. Firm understanding of the civilization (*peradaban*)'s historical origin, life-views, ancestral custom, cultural values and architectural identity will robustly mould the community's future generation's quality of life as they are interconnected and an integral part of architecture. The matrilineal Malay communities of Negeri Sembilan (NS) in Malaysia known to manifest their socio-cultural uniqueness in their traditional built form (Masri et al., 2015a; Masri et al., 2015b).

This paper's findings are aimed to reassert the authenticity NS Malay architectural identified, in comparison to the Minangkabau traditional house and as a platform for researchers seeking further understanding in reinterpreting quality of life of the Malay Civilization (*Peradaban Melayu*)'s cultural environment and realm in contemporary Malaysian architecture. As Ishak (2007) emphasized, "Getting it right." However, the word '*Malay*' in this paper is interpreted in the broader sense than the Malaysian constitutional definition. The explanation of the meanings in this research context is imperative to avoid statements that may otherwise seem offensive in other Malay Archipelago countries.

1.1. Research background

The aim of this research is to uncover the authenticity of NS Malay traditional architectural language, with Rembau as the research site, based on historical significance explained in Masri et al. (2012). The study was inspired when NS Malay architectural identity booth design was misrepresented by Minangkabau identity (a community from the West Sumatra in Indonesia) at the Shanghai World Expo 2010, following the Rasa Sayang song conflict in October 2007 and the misrepresentation of Tarian Barongan as a Malaysian folk dance in December 2007. Within a scope of a single paper, it is not possible to describe in detail their historical relationships. Avoidance of misconceptions in comprehending will require further readings of Masri (2012; 2013), Masri et al. (2012) and Masri & Ahmad (2012) papers.

1.2. Research limitations

Owing to the parameters set by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme, where funds are only for site activities within Malaysia, therefore any information and data regarding other countries within the current paper are entirely dependent on the literatures.

2. Literature reviews

Almost all literatures regarding any of the Malay communities in the Malay Civilization (*Peninsula Malay, Batak, Minangkabau, Javanese, Bugis, Tagalog* etc.), primarily related to history and culture, the readers will be required to understand this civilization from the prehistoric time (Hall, 1966; Idrus, 1996; Ishak, 2007; Masri et al., 2015a) before the Sunda Shelf (Sundaland) was sunken. Hall stated that these areas were not merely cultural appendages of India or China but have their own strongly marked individuality. He seriously warned against the tendency to overstress the part played by imported cultures and to under-rate the importance of the indigenous one of the area. Hall even deprecated the use of terms such as 'Little China', 'Indo-China', 'Further India' and 'Greater India'. Current scenario equating the Ancient Spice Routes to Maritime Silk Routes had materialized despite Hall's

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