

**CHINESE DÉCOR AND MOTIFS IN THE INTERIOR
DECORATION: A STUDY ON THE OLD MOSQUE IN MALACCA
IN THE EARLY 18th CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the Chinese motifs and interior decoration in the mosques in Melaka in the 18th century. The acceptance of the influence of Chinese decorative and motif in the construction of mosques by the people of Malacca at that time was interesting. The mosque is an important place for Muslims and thus to ensure the appearance and majestic architecture of the mosque at the time they use Chinese motif and architecture. Chinese motifs and decorative carved on the mosque's wall shows the freedom and openness of the society. Although symbols and motifs very close to the beliefs and culture of Chinese, the people of Malacca still accept it. With sculptures and Chinese patterns in mosques in Melaka, prove that Islamic societies understand the truth meaning of Islam and this religion can be practiced by all people regardless of race and nation.

Keywords: *Chinese décor, motif, mosque*

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MOTIF DAN ORNAMENTASI CINA DALAM HIASAN DALAMAN: KAJIAN TERHADAP MASJID TERTUA DI MELAKA PADA ABAD KE 18

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada motif dan hiasan dalaman Cina yang terdapat pada masjid-masjid sekitar Melaka yang wujud dalam abad ke 18. Pengaruh hiasan dan motif Cina pada binaan masjid memberikan maksud yang pelbagai dan boleh diterima oleh masyarakat Melaka pada ketika itu. Masjid juga merupakan tempat ibadah yang terpenting bagi umat Islam, justeru bagi memastikan penampilan dan keagungan seni bina, motif Cina diterapkan sebagai motif dalam seni bina masjid pada waktu itu. Hiasan dan motif Cina yang diukir pada dinding masjid menunjukkan kebebasan dan keterbukaan masyarakat ketika itu yang menerima kemasukan pelbagai seni dan motif bagi memperlihatkan kemegahan dan keagungan sesebuah masjid. Biarpun simbol dan motif itu sangat rapat dengan kepercayaan dan budaya Cina, namun masyarakat Melaka melihatnya sebagai sesuatu yang berbeza kerana memiliki keunikannya yang tersendiri. Dengan ukiran dan motif Cina di masjid-masjid di Melaka membuktikan bahawa masyarakat Islam Melaka pada ketika itu memahami secara mendalam pengertian Islam dan agama ini boleh dianuti oleh seluruh masyarakat tanpa mengira kaum dan bangsa.

Kata kunci: *hiasan Cina, motif, masjid*

INTRODUCTION

The architecture and design of the building are always evolving and happening around the world and the architectural development of this reason is due to a some of situations involving environmental factors. Human life in this world is in line with the evolution of human nature and in no way spared from the natural rotation set of Allah. These natural laws that serve are to regulate human behavior, including cultural and life contexts. But human culture helped to produce architecture and design is growing up today parallel with the evolution of human thought (Rini Trisulowati, 2008).

The mosque is a symbol of greatness for Muslims all over the world. Islam's highness remains a center of community development either in the world or in the West (Nash Rahman, 1998). The mosque also became an important monument of Muslims and it is not merely a pure architectural or can only be viewed on a physical and visual form, but has all kinds of activities inside in implementing the Islamic law (Abdul Rochym, 1983).

These mosques had appeared with their own architectural style together with a complete design, various forms and patterns which created based on life, customs as well as the designers' background that made the mosque. (Abdul Rochym, 1983) In addition, the ruler has become a reason that affects the development of architecture. This is due to the government often instruct a construction of a lavish mosque in order to highlight the leaders' influence by showing off their opulence and power, especially when the Muslims country had reached the impressive level (Abdul Rochym, 1983). What determines the value and quality of the building architecture are the culture of a nation, according to the tastes and desires of that nation (Abdul Rochym, 1983).

DEFINITION OF MOSQUE

Islamic architecture is part of Islamic culture and people built it to meet human needs and worshipping to Allah S.W.T. Due to this, the role of Islamic architecture is mainly to afford the human activities in order to meet faith in Allah S.W.T (Abdul Rochym, 1983). According to Gazalba (1975), the word "*masjid*" comes from a root word which means prostration (sajd). Mohamad Tajuddin (1999) also provides the same definition of the mosque, which means the place of prostration.

There is evidence from the Hadith discussed on mosques. It stated that "*has become the land of the mosque place to bow down to me.*" From the above hadith, it provides a clear definition that mosque means prostration (Aboebakar, 1995). There is also a hadith stated that the earth is a place for Muslims to pray, therefore, there is no special place or any other clean places that can be regarded as a mosque.

THE BEGINNING OF THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE MALAY WORLD AND CHINESE

The arrival of Chinese to Malay world can be classified into three main phases which involving the earliest settlement era, the reign of the Japanese and after independence. In this regard, the Chinese community is already decades settled in Malaya (Tan Chee Beng, 1993). The relationship of people of Chinese and Malacca is determined by two historical factors. The first reason is those who came to Malacca as a merchant, as recommended by the Chinese government. The second reason is through marriage that occurred between the Chinese who have long been settled in Malacca (Yusoff Iskandar, 1978).

The relationship between Malacca and Chinese grew closer when Malacca request protection from Chinese to prevent from Siamese attacks. The proliferation of the Chinese community in Malacca is so rapidly when the princess of Chinese Hang Li Po had a marriage with the Sultan of Malacca. There are a change and cultural assimilation that is visible in public life in

Malaysia from various aspects of life. At the beginning of the 18th century, Dutch policy is facing difficulties as a result of the threat of the British who is the new power at that time. The Netherlands faces the pressure arising from the war in Europe as well as attacks from local residents who want to reclaim their territory. Malays are aware that a such action is a form of oppression and humiliation against the religion of Islam. With the awareness, the Muslim community began to rise up and continue to fight in order to uphold the Islamic religion.

The Netherlands then took steps to capture the hearts of local residents as well as giving permission to build places of worship, especially in urban areas to get the support of the local population. Furthermore, the craftsmen skilled in carpentry shop building from Chinese imported by the Dutch to build places of worship including the mosque in Malacca. Therefore, a clear impact can be seen in the pattern as well as decoration of mosque in Malacca.

THE TYPE OF MOSQUE IN MALACCA

The Muslim communities residing in Malacca were beginning to build mosque and prayer rooms for use by local residents since the 14th century. This construction has begun to occur before officially opened in 1403 AD. When the government of Malacca erected on the Islamic rebellions, the mosque began to be developed for the use of the Muslim community in Malacca.

In the early stages, the construction of mosques in Malacca does not have its own identity. This monument was built in accordance with the form castles and the magnifying houses at that time constructed and was facing Qiblah. At the front can be seen at home in Imam stand facing Qiblah. The back side is visible water tank or well use to take ablution or wuduk. Nowadays, the mosques in Malacca took a sample from an existing mosque such as Tengkeri Mosque and Kampung Hulu Mosque and similar forms of construction were apparent.

In the 19th century a number of mosques have been built in Malacca and architectural design similar to the architecture of the mosque in the region such as Masjid Jamek Telok Mas Batu 6 ½ which was built-in 1826, Masjid Jamek Hujung Pasir built-in 1829, Masjid Duyong Batu 3 ½ was built in 1850, Masjid Bukit Cina in 1861 and Masjid Alai Batu 4 ¾ in 1890 (Abdul Halim, 1979). In addition, a similar monument in terms of architecture can be viewed at mosques in Java such as Masjid Agung Demak and Masjid Kampung Laut in Kelantan. Significant similarities can be seen in the mosques of this architectural identity of mosques in the region at that time.

Old mosques in Malacca can be categorized into sino-eclectic form. These mosques consist of floor, located above ground level similar to the mosque in Indonesia. In this very common form of the roof can be seen in two forms, namely mosque has two layers and three layers (Mastor Surat, 2008). Mosques are mostly found in Malacca has a multi-tiered roof or pyramid roof.

Patterns with carving and Chinese décor is very significant and can be seen at the ends of the roof and at the peak of the mosque can also be found at the places of worship of Chinese society. The use of bricks and tiles has the influence of Chinese architecture. This is because, the mosque can be seen on the west side of the Straits of Malacca particularly in Minangkabau district where the roof made by wood and ijuk, the fiber taken from enau tree. Mosques with a pyramid-shaped roof also have a tower that would typically resemble pagoda (Ezrin Arbi, 1971).

The sino-eclectic mosque that can hold three areas Masjid Kampung Hulu, Masjid Tenggera and Masjid Kampung Keling. These mosques were located in urban areas. Therefore, this mosque has always been the focus of traders in view of the strategic location in the urban areas. The mosques be fenced with the stone fence and gate like a Chinese temple. According to history, these mosques were built by the Chinese traders. Due to this, the vagaries of the structural elements are possible and forge the shape of Chinese architecture. For instance, Masjid Kampung Keling has a tower-shaped pagoda. In addition, the gateway of the mosque also resembles the Chinese gateway. The mosques are decorated with interesting Chinese carvings in the prayer hall and the outside of the mosque (Ezrin Arbi, 1971).

SYMBOLS IN CHINESE ARCHITECTURE

Chinese culture has a symbolism that has been present since thousands of years ago. Each symbol has its own meaning. Decorative motifs and the various traditions in Chinese made manifest as a result of the idea based on philosophy, history, legend, Tao, Confucian and the tradition of Buddhism (Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2001). The symbols exist in the form of visual and non-visual form. Visual symbols normally appear in the form of the décor colors to suit the purpose of the symbol. A symbol that cannot be seen visually normally exist in the religious ritual activities in the Chinese community. There are eight Buddhist symbols that are often used as a motif and decoration because each symbol has its own meaning and usage. For instance, wheel, coaches shells, fish pairing, eternal bond, blooms, vases, skies and umbrellas (Museum of Art Malaysian Muslim, 2001).

Decoration in Chinese architecture can be grouped into five types of animals (fauna), plants (flora), phenomenon, legends and geometric (Moedjiono, 2011). ornamental are something very important in Chinese architecture. Most of the decorations available in Chinese architecture are not only for mere ornaments but the decoration is considered part of the construction of a building and ornaments is certainly compatible with the environment (Cai & Lu, 2006).

Chinese motifs and symbols are different from other cultures because each symbol has a specific meaning. These symbols have been embedded in the minds of the Chinese community as a good sign and positive good luck that will

bring prosperity to the Chinese community (Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2001). Motives and ornaments in Chinese architecture, in general, can be divided into seven clusters comprising of flora, fauna, geometry, cosmos, calligraphy, equipment and human character (Lim Lee Hock & Ismail Said, 2001). The author just discusses a cluster that can be found in the mosque in Malacca.

a) Animals (Fauna)

Forms and Chinese elements contain patterns and symbols of living creatures that have its own meaning, in an example as a guardian of security and bearer of good luck. Animals that are often used as decorative motifs such as dragons, tigers, lions, Hong bird, phoenix (peacock), turtles, elephants, bats, Qilin (Chinese mystic animals), deer and white egret.

b) Dragon

The dragon motif carving begins with a manifestation and has its own starting with a dragon body circumference, scales, eyes and fangs. Each of these elements one has its own uniqueness (Karsam, 1999). Carved dragon and Hong bird are one of the Chinese cultural in the life of the community. This mythical animal becomes a principle and guidelines in designing the buildings. This animal is a symbol of the greatness (Rini & Priest, 2008) and Eastern societies never considered the dragon as a horrific and terrifying animal such as the assumption that Westerners imagine dragons as evil powered animals (Williams, 1974). In general, the dragon is described as a large animal, has sharp claws and can blow fire out of its mouth. The dragon is described as an animal that comes from a family of reptiles and eggs for breeding process. There are two forms of the dragon that is often used in the decoration, such as the winged dragon and dragon with scaly body and long like a snake and has a pair of arms and legs (Rosmawati, 2012).

For the Chinese, the dragon is the animal that is most popular and widely used as a decoration and forge modes. This animal is believed to have a changing energy and very powerful. The dragon is not the scary creatures but serves security for the property. In addition, the dragon is also known as a symbol of strength, justice and power. The dragon can be found in three forms such as long, Li and jaw. Long dragon is often used. It has camel-shaped head, eyed rabbit, caterpillar necked, horned antelope, have a stomach like a frog and have tiger paws. This type of dragon has the advantage to change the appearance of the form. The animal that typically is seen side by side with this dragon is the tiger. Both these animals represent the strength and fight against the influence of evil who try to interfere. Instead of being known as a powerful animal,

the tiger also means devotion (Moedjiono, 2011). Inside the mosque is not seen clearly carved dragon, but only parts of the animal body are only used as a carving of dragon scales and head. This is in accordance with Islamic injunction that prohibits the use of carving animals as decoration.

c) Butterfly

These animals are often associated with ancestral spirits that come to bring a reminder to grandchildren. Butterflies are also considered a symbol of longevity (Museum of Islamic Art, 2001). These animals also mean joy and a symbol of the summer. Butterfly pattern and is often used as decoration on pottery and embroidery on garments. The butterfly beauty with interesting pattern and variety colors often used as inspiration for poets and artists in order to produce quality poetry and painting (Museum of Islamic Art, 2001).

d) Plants (Flora)

Every flower in Chinese has its own meaning. Flora is often used as the main motive in decoration such as textiles, porcelain and carpets. In addition, plant decorations can also be seen in the architecture and design of buildings including painting. The plants are often used as a motif in Chinese décor and forge modes such as peony flower, lotus, bamboo trees, banyan trees and casuarinas trees. Peony flowers symbolize courage and the lotus flowers symbolize purity. Cherry blossoms, bamboo, banyan trees and casuarinas trees mean four charitable nature. These crops have a high durability. This is because these plants can survive in any kind of weather. The uniqueness of the flowers is also known as Ban Jien Jieng or in Malays language “young throughout the year”. In addition, this plant is also known as longevity, patience and wisdom.

Peony, the queen of all types of flowers that symbolize wealth and honor (Lou Qingxi, 2002). Besides having beautiful and varied colors, the flowers also indicate the nature of women's beauty. Chrysanthemums connote peace and a long life because it has the high durability to withstand in the winter chills (Museum of Islamic Art, 2001). Bamboo trees, pine, and prunes are a three-tier plant because the plant is always fresh even in cold weather. These plants represent the four seasons, the peony represents spring, the lotus represents summer, chrysanthemums representing autumn and prunes representing winter.

For the Chinese, the vase symbolised of the importance of knowledge and achievement (Islamic Arts Museum, 2001). Flower pots made of porcelain specifically designed for certain flowers. Plant pot shaped according to the woman's body and the flower is said to be suitable for carrying porcelain are Peony and orchid fit the shape of the vase (Williams, 1974). The grapes were introduced in Chinese in 126 BC

brought in by the minister Chang Ch'ien during his action of going back from the Indo-Scythians. The grapes are also used for artistic purposes and motives as a pattern sideline (Williams, 1974).

e) Geometry

Geometric shapes describe are not only focused on one form only. There are specific mode décor used in Chinese architecture. Among the decorative motives is defined as a balance of Yin and Yang symbol. These two elements represent the positive and negative elements. It is the fundamental of the Feng Shui. Even though every living thing lives in contrary but both the elements often contiguous with each other in the eternal power of Yin and Yang. The Broken line represents Yin line continue to reflect that.

These symbols are believed to reject the evil influence and lead to prosperity and security (Moedjiono, 2011). Therefore, geometric decoration resulted based on Yin and Yang.

Swastika emblem is a symbol that widely used throughout the world and this symbol can be detected in the culture and traditions of the community. This symbol is often associated with good of luck. Apart from the swastika, it is also known by the name of Suastika, svatica or svatika. In addition, it is also referred to as shubhtika which means a good sign and a good body, good luck for anyone who use it. This emblem has been often a symbol of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. Style left-facing swastika is considered to be related to the crime and disadvantages (Mohd Sabrizaa, 2008). In addition, there are decorations consisting of flat pattern resulting from the joint geometry with angular patterns. This decoration is said to be a symbol of lightning associated with joy and as a Buddhist swastika symbol representing the sun (Museum of Islamic Art, 2001).

Awan larat and scrolls are refined from floating Ju'i, the mace by the gods and the scrolls associated with knowledge when surrounded by awan larat of it symbolizes education, learning and spiritual awareness (Islamic Arts Museum, 2001). The Chinese community has high skills in manufacturing art scroll, this pattern always decorates every home of the Chinese population. For Buddhism, the scroll symbolizes purity and truth (Williams, 1976). Several major mosques were selected to see the effect and decorative od Chinese motifs on mosques in Malacca.

Table 1: Motives And Chinese Ornamental At mosques in Malacca

No.	Mosque	Motifs	Type	Location
1.	Kg. Keling Mosque		Peony	Decoration is found on the roof of the mosque
			Scroll	Decoration is found on the roof of the mosque.
			Geometry	Decoration is found on the roof of the mosque
			Lotus	Mustoka or decorative crown places on lotus flower. The form of Buton often associated with stupa (dome enclosing an effigy of Buddha) and bases are usually found in Buddhist decorations (Mohd Sabrizaa, 2008).

2	Tengkera Mosque		Lotus	This motif can be found in the mosque chamber.
3.	Kg. Keling Mosque		Lotus	The lotus flower in reverse position can be seen at the gate of the mosque.
4.	Kg. Alai Mosque		Lotus	This motif is found in the pulpit of the mosque.
5.	Tengkera Mosque		Lotus	Same like rosewood that exist during Ming Dynasty.

6.	Bkt Piatu Mosque		Lotus	Can be found in the peak pulpit of the mosque
7.	Tengkera Mosque		Swastika	Can be found at the back door of this mosque.
8.	Tanjung Keling Mosque		Swastika	Can be found on the stairs in the mosque.
9.	Tengkera Mosque		Vase	This vase is available in a mosque pulpit.

10.	Tengker Mosque		Water vase	Available at the mosque pulpit.
11.	Bkt. Piatu Mosque		Peony and vase	Decorative vase containing peony flower can be seen on the side of the mosque pulpit.
12.	Tengker Mosque		Fruits	Can be found in the pulpit of the mosque.

13.	Kg. Keling Mosque		Grapes and plum	Can be found in the pulpit of the mosque. Grape motif can also be seen in the oldest Chinese temple in Malacca, the Cheng Hoon Teng temple (1625).
14.	Kg. Hulu Mosque		Dragon scales	Can be seen at the peak of mosque pulpit.
15.	Bkt. Piatu Mosque		Dragon Head	There is at the end of the roof pulpit.
16.	Kg. Keling Mosque		Peony	Peony flower motifs in ceramic decoration can be seen at the peak of the mosque gate.
17.	Peringgit Mosque		Butterfly	Butterfly motifs are clearly visible on the side of the mosque pulpit

18.	Peringgit Mosque		Bamboo tree	Available on the side of the pulpit
19.	Kg. Keling Mosque		Plum	Mosque roof

Source: Observation research on selected mosques, Buddhist temple and museum Malacca on February 23 to March 3, 2012

CONCLUSION

Chinese arts has its own aesthetic values, motives and ornament used to decorate a building add to the uniqueness of the building. Although the basis for the formation of this Chinese art is based on animism and Buddhism, but the ornament successfully converted them to Islam as it does not violate the shari'a. A good engraving result has not only brightened the space but also highlights the building features a very impressive craftsmanship. It clearly shows the skills of craftsmen carved the symbol of nature manifested in tangible form. The role of artisans builds this mosque incorporates elements of local and foreign art featuring a monument full of worship and purity of the pious. As a result, there has been a mosque with colorful art in terms of beauty and aesthetics. The findings of the images and forms of pre-Islamic are made manifest in the form of visual and without its original purposes. In addition, the Muslim community in China also accepts all forms of decoration even if they are muslims. This is because, the decorations and motifs have been deeply ingrained in the Chinese muslim community are still strong with their cultural practices.

Islam is not a religion in the form of coercive and accommodating or recklessly, Islam does not forbid the use of these motifs, and there are no

restrictions at all in using the motifs of a pre-Islamic system as long as it is not against the Islamic law. So for that reason, Islam is easily accepted by society in the Malay world. Almost all of Chinese motifs and ornamentations can be found in all the oldest mosque in Malacca. However, the use of the motif with the largest number can be found on the historic mosque that was recognized by National Heritage Department, Malacca state government. These beauty motifs and ornamentations show the role of Chinese carpenter in charge resulting in an art that is worth and scarce in mosques outside of state Malacca.

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