

Interpreting the Link Between the Malay Cultural Landscape and Malay Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Malay poetry has been identified as one of the essential elements in Malay traditional life, art, design, and aesthetic references. The Malay poetry element has its philosophy and purpose of enhancing Malay landscape designs as well as art character values. This review paper aims to interpret the link between the Malay cultural landscape with the compositions of Malay poetry. This review paper was conducted using the content analysis method. The nature, function, and similarity of Malay customs are encapsulated within Malay poetry, and these features are also present in the Malay cultural landscape which are key elements in the current research. Furthermore, this review paper seeks to acquire knowledge of the Malay cultural landscape that is woven in Malay poetry and the Malay world life. The identification of the features of the Malay cultural landscape may assist environmental researchers in Malaysia as it may act as a reference to assist in the design of an authentic Malay cultural landscape that encapsulates the original roots of the Malay culture.

Keywords: Malay cultural landscape; the way of life; Malay poetry; design; architecture.

INTRODUCTION

According to Shaari and Rahman (2017), the Malay tradition exists based on attachment within the experience towards the lifestyle and the surrounding environment of the Malaysians. The Malay dwellers in the past would always evoke their existence through the uniqueness of art, design, and custom, which also shows strong symbolism and meaning behind their lifestyle (Alimin, 2014; Juki, 2018). They are also denoted; the process of tradition dissemination occurs through both verbal and written mediums. According to Vela, Nogue and Govers (2017), a tradition or traditional lifestyle enables a perceptible narrative to occur and paints an attractive symbolic action towards a particular location; thus, the values, meaning and symbolism may be discerned. Opportunely, the benefits on the symbolism of place can also be found in Malay poetry. During the reign of Sultan Melaka in the 14th and 15th centuries, the song *Dondang Sayang* (a genre of traditional Malay poetry) is often played in the festivals of the royal families and nobles (Ahmad, 2016). This tradition implies the aesthetic value of the Malay world, the meaning of Malay art, and the symbolism of place from the Malays' perspective

of life (Peters & Joseph, 1995; Akhesah & Saludin, 2017). The tradition also witnessed the introduction of the element of Malay poetry and the background of life between nature and the Malay culture around the surrounding element, uncovering the attitudes, beliefs, and activities of the societies in the past centuries (Perera & Audrey, 2018; Muhi, 2018). Hence, the interconnection indicates a close relationship between the Malays perspective of nature and culture in expressing their aesthetic feeling towards the natural environment, culture, tradition, and customs (Hussain et al., 2015b).

The traditional Malays were fond of using the natural and cultural elements surrounding them. The Malay poetry, for example, displayed a sense of assortment as a way to deliver messages, including the idea of a Malay landscape garden (Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Yunos, 2015). The Malay artist has described nature and Malay culture in a Malay poetry entitled *Tebang Tebu, Kuala Sawa*, which expressed the integration between the Malay dwellers, and their natural and cultural environment (Zakaria, 2015). This poem described the uniqueness of a Malay village settlement along an estuary named Kuala Sawa. *Kuala* in Malay means estuary while *Sawa* in Malay is referring to types of edible fruit species. Hence, most of the plant that inspired this poem such as *tebu* (sugarcane) and *sawa* (sapidilla), usually found along the riverbank in the kampong that implies the value of the Malay lifestyle, and their cultural working activities including harvesting crops such as *tebu* and *sawa* by farmers as well as do fishing activities at the estuary (Syed & Ibrahim, 2019).

The rhythm of *Tebang Tebu, Kuala Sawa* indicates the symbolism and picturesque of a Malay village; it embraces the outer dimension, and the home and roots of the Malay tradition, culture, customs, and life which has a strong identity and is incomparable to material world (Kiddcruz, 2017). The Malay poetry implies peaceful and harmonious way of life of the Malay peoples in with their own unique natural and cultural environment (Ahmad, Bakar, & Ibrahim, 2006; Omar, 2015). Indeed, the traditional Malay people enjoyed a superior way of life-based on the principle of harmony by highlighting their culture and surrounding nature (Hussain, et al., 2015a). Taecharungroj (2019), opined that nature and cultural environment surrounding a place create the place's signature and identity as perceived by others. On the other hand, this paper aims to interpret the elements from Malay poetry and link to the sustainability of the Malay cultural landscape. In this paper, the authors studied past archives related to Malay poetry, architecture and design of the Malay landscape, where the initiation of the study was through the selection of few Malay poetries. The poetries were selected based on the criteria that depict the visual imagery of the place and touch on the natural elements, culture and Malay behaviour. From the initial analysis, providentially shown that the environment has an effect on Malay poetry reflecting the cultural perspective, including the physical, social and perceptual factors behind sustainable livelihood.

MALAY POETRY

According to Hussain et al., (2020) and Juki (2018) Malay poetry is a literary form that uses various aesthetic and rhythmic languages, such as phonesthetics, the symbolism of sound, as well as movement of metrics, in evoking the sense of place or to describe a place environment. Besides that, the Malay poetry often plays a crucial role in music performances which form a strong impression on artistry and rhythmic values of the Malay language (The Gameness Till the End, 2011). Furthermore, in the Malay civilization, the role of Malay poetry is an essential value in shaping people's identity and place (Firduansyah, Rohidi, & Utomo, 2016). As denoted by previous researchers, one of the most well-known Malay literatures is Malay poetry (Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Yunos, 2015). Each of the Malay poetry is expressed in its distinctive style and form (Effendy, 2014). According to Akmal (2015), Malay poetry has a broad purpose of conveying the elements of giving a lesson and metaphor in a subtle, orderly, and polite way. It covers various aspects related to the cultural landscape between nature and space synchronized with the element of the physical, social and perceptual structure as a background of an object (Perera & Audrey, 2018).

Each component of the Malay poetry portrays the symbolism and the picturesque of the cultural community and surrounding environment of the Malay. Their life routine becomes the future manifesto and a guide for new generations in shaping their lives more harmoniously and balance while incorporating the elements of nature, man and God (Hussain, Hassan, & Akhir, 2016). Aripin (1977) noted that each of these aspects in Malay poetry such as space, culture, and environment component as well as the physical structure is part of a Malay cultural landscape that includes the life structure between nature, man, and God. One of the best examples, from a Malay poetry entitled *Pantun Budi* narrated the aspect of nature and culture of the Malay people (Salim, 1999). *Pantun Budi* also described the Malay home garden and physical structures of a Malay kampong at traditional times (Maliki, 2010; Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Yunus, 2015). The motion clarified the spatial orientation of the Malay landscape home garden interestingly in the poetry of *Pantun Budi*:

*Bunga selasih si bunga padi,
Basil blossoms, paddy blossoms,
Kembanglah mekar di dalam taman.
Flourished in the garden.
Baru menguntum kemboja rimbun,
Frangipani flowers have just bloomed,
Mekar harumnya seri halaman.
Their pleasant fragrance enchants the yard.*

(Salim, 1999)

For instance, the incorporation of metaphors in poetry plays a notable role in demonstrating the reference in the designs, especially towards the Malay landscape context. Since the Malay people live largely in villages, exhibit the condition when they used Malay poetry in their routine as part of showing flair in conversation, regardless whether it was for significant events, a social ceremony, and mainly for entertainment purposes (Izadi & Mohammadi, 2016). The metaphors have commonly utilised the paint of certain images, feelings and emotions. Besides, it widely used in narrating the Malay history by describing their community and place, moreover, shown the Malay cultural values and finally reflect the unique nature of Malay people (Ismail & Mohd Ariffin, 2015). According to Mohammad, Ismail, Ismail and Ariffin (2019), the sophistication, subtlety and intellectual depth possessed by the Malay people in showing their metaphor poems by linking nature with the background situation to convey the real meaning of the message. Hence, these elements symbolise the identity of Malay history, culture, and values still exist broadly by overlooking the Malay community in the past.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research method that used the content analysis technique. This method collects and analyses the text content data of three Malay poetry namely; *Pantun Budi*, *Cuci Kaki* and *Tembang Tebu, Kuala Sawa*. The entire poetries were selected based on several criteria set by the authors. Among them are, depiction of the visual imagery of the places, the natural elements, culture and Malay behaviour in them. Documents related to the poems were obtained from the Malaysia National Archive, the original Malay manuscripts, web sites and published journal articles. According to Ibrahim (2014), the advantage of using content analysis techniques in research is that the researchers are enabled to obtain difficult information in theoretical studies, phenomenology, and historical studies. The same author also explained, this method is very useful to study sensitive issues related to the history, heritage, and culture of a society or race. In addition, this method is more flexible because it uses various types of unstructured documents.

DISCUSSION

After all, Malay poetry such as the folk songs and others has been identified as an essential element in the design and architecture of a Malay cultural landscape. The application of Malay poetry as an inspiration for art and crafts are distinct and still acceptable in this current world (Idrus, Yunos, Isa, & Rahman, 2018). The Malay poetry has a unique structure of its philosophy, which is meant to enrich the authentic value of the Malay customs and tradition (Salleh & Robson, 2010). According to Ismail, Hasan and Roshdi (2016) Malay poetry includes various forms and uses, among them are, the *Bangsawan* (comparable to the opera or theatre), *Irama Asli* (native poetry), and *Dikir Barat* (a musical combined with choir and choral). The elements used in creating the Malay poetry show the uniqueness and are meaningful as it reflects the Malay culture through the arrangement and composition of the Malay folk songs rhythm. Generally, the Malay poetry was created in styles portraying indirectly as references and analogies of the Malay communities (Brown & Roolvink, 1932). Such as, the sources of ideology in shaping the diversity of Malay poetry are inspired by *Alam* (nature), human behaviour, physical factor, and sociocultural aspect around the Malay context (Arifin, 2018).

The Malay landscape is seen as a form of adaptation of life in the environment practised by using the elements of nature as a material in daily activities and societies (Rahman, 2003). As expressed by Aziz, Jahi and Arifi (2014) the Malay culture does not deviate from nature that links from external functions to spirituality. Wonderfully, nature-inspired the Malay composed their poems by integrating the beauty of floras, fruits, and flowers in their music (Ismail et al., 2015). The expressions of flora and fauna derived the symbolism of place attachment. Furthermore, the poems inspired the design of the garden and landscape of a traditional Malay house (Ismail et al., 2015; Perera & Audrey, 2018). Most of the plants found in the traditional Malay house compound are fragrant and are of bright colours resembling the culture and tradition of the Malays (Harun, Ariffin, & Abdullah, 2017). For example, Malay people usually use fragrances flowers such as *Bunga tanjung* (Spanish cherry) and *Bunga kemboja* (Frangipani) by emphasizing the smell and colour. Hussain, Yunos, Ismail, Ariffin and Ismail (2020) expressed that the Malay cultural landscape is a source of pride for conventional Malay dwellers. Therefore, most of the plants found in the traditional Malay house compound are fragrant and are of bright colours resembling the culture and tradition of the Malays (Salleh & Sakip, 2016). For example, the *Bunga tanjung* and *Bunga kemboja* are usually being used by Malay people for their fragrance and colour (Ismail, 2018).

Moreover, according to Singgora (2020) in a traditional Malay cultural landscape philosophy, fragrant flower trees such as *Bunga kemboja* or scented shrubs such as *Bunga selasih* (Basil blossoms) are always planted near to a *tempayan* (large urn containing bathing water) or a well (referred to FIGURE. 1). Excitingly, when the gentle breeze blows through the trees, the fragrant flowers from the trees will fall into the *tempayan*, thus perfuming the bathing water and creating aromatherapy (Ahmadi, 2016). The aromatherapy from the flower not only smells pleasant for a therapeutic sensation but also portrays natural and cultural value, as noted in the Malay poetry *Pantun Budi*. Aside from that, the location of the urn is placed at the main stair entrance (referred to FIGURE. 2). It symbolizes as a protection of the home from evil spirits based on the beliefs of the Malay dwellers. This dissertation can be seen in Malay poetry titled *Cuci kaki*:

*Membasuh kaki di tangga,
Washing feet on the stairs,
Cucikan diri jiwa raga,
Spiritual cleansing for serenity soul,
Pada binaan ada falsafahnya,
In architecture, there is a philosophy,
Bukan sekadar tempayan dan rumah sahaja.
It's not just the urn and the house.*

(Singgora, 2020)

According to Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail and Yunos (2015) and Hussain et al., (2016), the practice of putting the urn near the entrance (stairs) of the house enabling the homeowner to clean their feet before entering the house. For example, when the homeowner just arrived home, they washed their feet first before entering the house as a protection from outer impurities (Roslan, 2014). Indeed, since they clean their feet, it indirectly washes away germs or bacteria, which are being referred to as evil spirits (Sulaiman, 1995). In addition, this practice is believed to bring good luck, fertility and to ward off evil thus, it s a daily routine of the Malay dweller and the surrounding environment around them. Besides, the Malay poetry depicts the grandeur and beauty of the thinking of the Malay artists previously as they used nature to understand the philosophy and culture of the nation, particularly in terms of craftsmanship, layout, and design (Zaini & Jalaluddin, 2019). Also, some of the poetry expresses the meticulousness and the subtlety of the Malay intellectuals in benefitting the natural phenomenon in their everyday life.



Figure 1: Depiction of fallen fragrant flower into the urn, creating an aromatherapy smell for the Malay home garden (Source: Singgora, 2020).



Figure 2: The role of the urn is an essential component in the Malay home garden (Source: Singgora, 2020).

From the Malays perspective, the concept of layout or design in a Malay cultural landscape has the meaning and symbolism toward nature and cultural life (Chan, 2013). As depicted in the Malay poetry, the Malay people remind others that beauty Malay poetry is not just confined to the material realm (Ahmad, Bakar, & Ibrahim, 2006). Rather, it also reflects the dimension of reality and the spirit of art. Furthermore, the Malay poetry integrates the pattern of landscape design and expressed the emotion via skills, artistry, and the sincerity of the tradition. Beneficent, The Malay poetry inspired through various channels that represent the customs, regulations, environment, nature, cultural elements, and

architectural designs of the past. Thus, the Malay poetry reflects the uniqueness of the Malay world as an ecological structure that connects to God, man and nature.

CONCLUSION

The authors found similar characteristic in Malay poetry particularly it indicates the beauty patterns or layout in landscape design and represent the behaviour of Malay people in developing Malay cultural identity. Malay poetry represents the majority of the Malays' collective memory and guidelines for the modern generation, especially in Malay society. The Malay literature is a repository of ideas on how the Malay people used in blessing land as a key reference for the creation of culture and spirituality. The intensive efforts should be made to maintain and achieve a more positive result in preserving the cultural landscape of the Malays Society. Therefore, this paper, shows the value of Malay poetry and how it connects with the Malay cultural landscape has been addressed. Based on these findings, the local authority is encouraged to commercialize the resources of the Malay poetry more commercialised as an effort in reducing any harmful effects to the environment, by way of offering a design that is adaptable in continuously changing the needs, and embracing the Malay poetry as a guideline for future development. A strategy towards a sustainable cultural landscape can also help foster social cohesion within the community by using Malay poetry. Hence, social activities inspired by Malay poetry can be used as a guidance in the Malay culture landscape planning. This will indirectly attract the interest among the society to learn in depth about the Malay culture. Simultaneously, the designs that are influenced by Malay poetry may also inspire more vibrant environmental landscape. Conclusively, the study shows that there is a cultural connection between Malay life and the environment. This study helps to better understand the Malay landscape in terms of Malay poetry production. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a source of ideas and catalysts for future studies in both the field of landscape study and cultural aspects.

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