

Application of Kelantan Traditional Aesthetic Values into the Architecture of Contemporary Homes

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Abstract

Every place has its own unique architectural qualities which are not only in terms of its physical makeup but, on how it is perceived. Hence, designers need to be sensitive to those unique qualities so they can enhance and sustain, rather than destroying them. However, to understand these unique qualities, one needs to approach it from the perspective of their aesthetic principles. This is because aesthetic is a critical reflection on art, culture and nature. But the question is; what are these aesthetic and architectural elements; are they still valid for present application? Therefore, to address these issues, this paper seeks to investigate and illuminate on Kelantan traditional aesthetic values. Ten aesthetic elements were identified, thus, the paper illustrates by examples how these elements can be integrated into the architecture of contemporary homes.

Keywords: Architecture, Kelantan aesthetic values, Traditional Malay architecture.

1. Introduction

According to Ezrin (1997), architecture reflects the society's way of life, their belief and philosophy; these altogether, form important components in the uniqueness of a culture. Regardless of traditional architecture being categorised as primitive, it has always been the main source of references in social and cultural studies by architects and anthropologists. However, its strength has always been in the basic principles of materials used and its expression of the surrounding and the design of its spaces (Oliver, 2003). Thus, architecture plays a far deeper role of determining the social and symbolic spaces that reflects the world view than merely a place to live.

Therefore, it is important to identify and sustain the aesthetic elements in traditional architecture as this will help in establishing local identity. In the light of this, this paper seeks to illuminate on the Kelantan traditional aesthetic values and how they can be applied into the architecture of contemporary homes.

2. Kelantan Traditional Aesthetic Values

Aesthetic is commonly known as the study of sensory or sensory-emotional values, sometimes called judgements of sentiment and taste. It is a critical reflection on art, culture and nature. Aesthetic judgements may be culturally

conditioned to some extent; however, the judgements of aesthetic value clearly rely on our ability to discriminate at a sensory level. Thus, this section seeks to identify and illuminate on Kelantan traditional aesthetic values.

2.1 *Bendul*

Bendul is a Malay word for a specially designed wooden beam (Fig 1a). This beam (*bendul*) is one of the elements of the Kelantan traditional house that serve to secure the structural framework of the house. Without it, the pillars of the house would not be stable. In Kelantan, *bendul* is the frame at the outer end of the floor. It is made to encircle the house, and served to separate the different portions of the house such as the veranda, the main house, the passage way and the kitchen (Wan & Abdul, 2011). The sectional shape of *bendul* is shown in Fig 1b below.



Figure 1a: Image of *bendul* wooden frame
Source: <http://rumahkayutradisional.blogspot.com/>

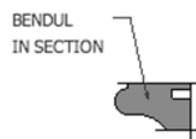


Figure 1b: Sectional shape of *bendul*

2.2 *Ekor Itek*

In Malay language, *ekor itek* is also known as *sulur bayung*. *Sulur* means the branch of a locally found creeping plant, the root that grows from the main trunk of a tree or a piece of metal wire. According to Abdullah (1990), *sulur bayung* refers to a decorative element on the roof. Has explained by Abdul Rahman (2000), *sulur* means the shoots of an ivy like plant while *bayung* is termed as a kind of decoration representing the long beans type of plant. However, in the local dialect of Kelantan, it is called *ekor itek*. Thus, *ekor itek* is a type of carving that's crept on the corner of the roof (the hip) (see Fig. 2). The carvings are found on the four corners of a hip roof; they are either made of ceramic or cement plaster. Has described by Abdullah (1978), this type of decoration in traditional Malay architecture looks like the tail of a ducks tail.



Figure 2: Image of *ekor itek* crept on the hip of roof

2.3 *Gunungan*

Gunungan is one of the ancient legacies of Kelantan-Pattani. Similar to the Balis, ancient Kelantan-pattani held on to religious and cultural traditions of Hinduism. Therefore, the top of their doors are design with *gunungan* (having motifs of their god's image), which is similar to the Balis (Fig. 3a). However, the transition from Hinduism to Islam around the Kelantan-pattani results in flora motivated approach. In line with the development of Islam in Kelantan, the concept of *gunungan* was still maintained but the gods shaped image motifs were removed and replaced with flora elements (Fig. 3b). Thus, the concept has been widely used at the top of the doors and entrance gate of ancient house and mosque (Fig. 3c). Hence, this can also be used in contemporary houses without need to change or adapt the concept. They reflect significant local identity because such forms are only available in Kelantan and Terengganu states in Malaysia.

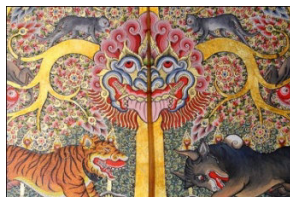


Figure 3a: Image of Hindu gods



Figure 3b: *Gunungan* with flora motif



Figure 3c: Doors with *gunungan* concept

2.4 *Tunjuk Langit*

In the architectural terminology of the Malay house, *tunjuk langit* often refers to two elements which are; the internal structural timber member of the roof, fixed centrally to function as a support for the ridge and king post. The second element is a timber piece or pointer attached to the tip of the roof (Rashid & Amat, 2008). Within the house, the sky (*langit*) forms the top of the house (the ceiling and roof), therefore, the first piece of the *tunjuk langit* is often referred to as pointing to the sky internally; while the second piece of *tunjuk langit* as another architectural element on the

outside tip of the roof pointing towards the real sky. In terms of functionality, the outside *tunjuk langit* has no role except for establishing identity. It is widely available in Terengganu and Kelantan

There are two significant forms of *tunjuk langit* in Kelantan; straight vertical shape (*Jenis batang*) and pumpkin-shaped (*jenis bulat*).

- i. Straight Vertical Shape (*Jenis Batang*): This type of *tunjuk langit* are formed using a piece of timber in an upright position at the tip of the gable end (Fig. 4a)



Figure 4a: *Jenis batang* (Straight Vertical Shape)

- ii. Pumpkin-Shaped (*Jenis Bulat*): This is commonly used on hip or pyramid type of roofing. They are positioned at the middle and top of the roof and most are made of carved timber solids or a concrete (Fig 4b).



Figure 4b: *Jenis bulat* (Pumpkin-Shaped)

2.5 *Buah Butung*

According to Rashid & Amat (2008), other names for *buah butung* are *tiang gantung*, *saka bentung*, *tiag bunting*. Yaakub (1996) defines *buah butung* as hanging column while Halim (1985) describes it as hanging column constructed on the bottom of the gable end of the roof (Fig. 5). It has a round shape looking very similar to bees' nest (Rashid & Amat, 2008). Also Utaberta et al, (2012) described it as a wood measuring about 60cm to 100cm mounted on the roof. It is a badge or symbol of a construction formwork, just like a gravestone on the tomb. Halim (1985) refers to it as a symbol of power and might of the house and its owner. It is commonly believed that if this form of decoration falls, it indicates bad omen to the occupant of the house (Rashid & Amat, 2008). Therefore, to avert the bad omen, a gathering or a special ceremony must be held to reposition the fallen *buah butung* to its original place. Hence, it is believed that the function of *buah butung* is to strengthen and act as a lock for the whole structure of the house.

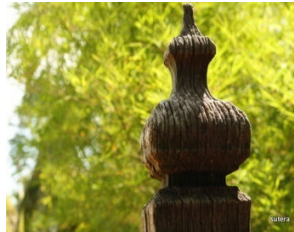


Figure 5: Picture of *buah butung* in upright position

2.6 Pintu Gerbang

This is the main door to the site in a residential area that is commonly found in Kelantan and Terengganu (Fig. 6). This element can be used as the identity of the local architectural language that can be highlighted, especially in residential buildings.

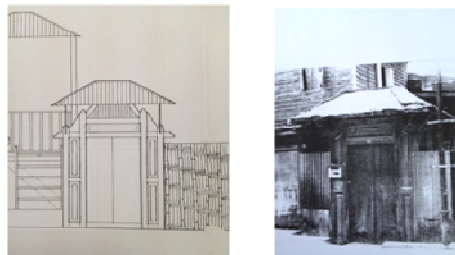


Figure 6: *Pintu gerbang*

2.7 Tebuk Tembus

This is a carving usually found above the entrance between two different functional spaces. It is also available in the wall for ventilation and natural lighting. The carving often have floral motif of scented flowers (Fig. 7a) and is usually positioned higher than eye level. This is intentional so as to prevent direct view into the home space. Also, the size of *tebuk tembus* is smaller in traditional Malay architecture of Kelantan (Fig. 7a); therefore, this results in the internal space to be quite gloomy or dark during the day due to lack of sunshine.

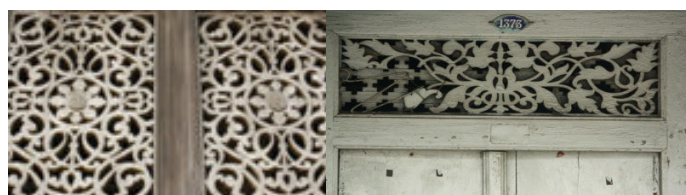


Figure 7a: *Tebuk tembus*

However, the climate, culture and tradition to make the vent (*tebuk tembus*) are one of the main features that make up the identity of traditional Kelantan architecture. Also, *tebuk tembus* has a measure of the rule “golden section” (Fig. 7b); this proved the value of its timeless beauty and across cultures and time. Therefore, its use as a separator panel and wind lattice space should not be modified; the shape and size must be retained in order to ensure that the local identity is preserved.



Figure 7b: *Tebuk tembus* with a measure of golden section rule

2.8 *Dinding Janda Berhias*

This is a wall panel, usually made with wooden material. These walls are usually found in the house of high social status. Besides being a physical barrier that serves as a protector from the weather and wild animals, it is also boundaries that restricts sight and hearing (Fig. 8)



Figure 8: *Dinding janda berhias*

2.9 *Pemeleh and Tebar Layar*

Tebar layar is a Malay word for gable roof design used in Kelantan traditional architecture, while *pemeleh* is a pair of timber pieces located on two fascia ends of the gable roof (*tebar layar*) (Fig. 9a). It is called *pemeleh* in Kelantan and Terengganu but called *papan laying* elsewhere in Malaysia (Rashid & Amat, 2008). According to Rashid & Amat (2008), *pemeleh* is shaped slightly curving and sharpens towards the top as a sign of strength in the design language of houses in Kelantan. It represents the heron birds as seen on the local fishermen boats. The bird is said to signify shelter and protection to the seagoing sailors as well as to the houses. According to Abdullah (1985), *pemeleh* can be described as a piece of sword (Fig. 9b), denoting strength and might. He also further argues that *pemeleh* is associated with the part of the human body such as the head and the arm.

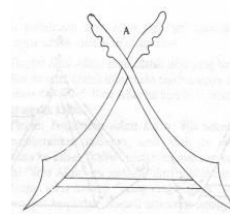


Figure 9a: *Pemeleh and Tebar Layar* Figure 9b: *Pemeleh* inform of sword

2.10 *Anjung*

Anjung is a Malay term that refers to the space fusion (external and internal space) in Kelantan traditional architecture. Kelantan traditional houses are known for side and top opening features (see Fig. 10). The functions of these openings are for ventilation and natural lighting.

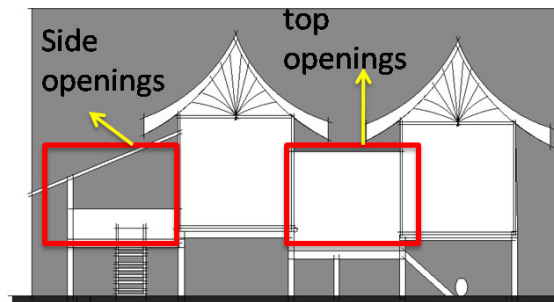


Figure 10: Illustration of Kelantan traditional house

3. Application in Contemporary Homes

Balanced being both inwardly and outwardly in residential buildings are factors that need to be addressed. This is because people are now shifting from materialistic needs to emotional needs (Rolf, 2004). They now seek things that satisfy their emotional and spiritual needs. However, it is believed that building designs that evoke memories is an approach to emotionally durable and sustainable design. According to Crossly (2003), the environments that people craft round themselves are rich with information about personalities, values and lifestyles. Therefore, integrating traditional aesthetic values into the architecture of contemporary homes is seen as an approach to achieve well-being in homes while maintaining the local identity.

Based on the ten (10) Kelantan traditional aesthetic values identified, this section illustrates by examples how these elements can be integrated into contemporary homes.

- i. *Bendul*: This can be structurally integrated into architecture of contemporary homes as illustrated in Fig. 11 below. This will give contemporary homes structural integrity and also help to uphold Kelantan heritage.

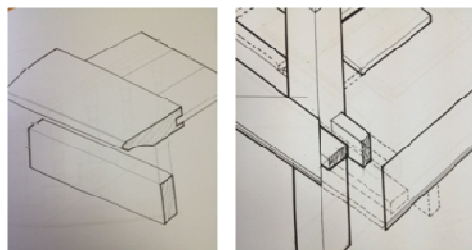


Figure 11: Illustrating diagram on how *bendul* can be applied in contemporary homes

- ii. *Ekor Itek*: Due to its position on the roof, it gives a clear identity in the building; therefore, this can be applied on the roof of contemporary homes (Fig.12) as this will help to sustain the traditional identity and heritage.



Figure 12: Application of *ekor itek*

iii. *Gunungan*: *Gunungan* concept can be introduced into contemporary homes through adaptive design (Fig. 13a) or direct application (Fig. 13b). This will reflect and sustain the significances of the local identity.



Figure 13a: Adaptive design



Figure 13b: Direct application

iv. *Tunjuk Langit*: As this aesthetic element only function to establish identity, it can also be applied in contemporary buildings (Fig. 14) to establish and sustain the local identity.



Figure 14: Application of *tunjuk langit*

v. *Buah Butung*: Since it's believed that the function of *buah butung* is to strengthen and act as a lock for the whole structure of a house; integrating this element into contemporary homes will help to sustain the heritage and beliefs. However, its application can be adaptive design (Fig. 15).

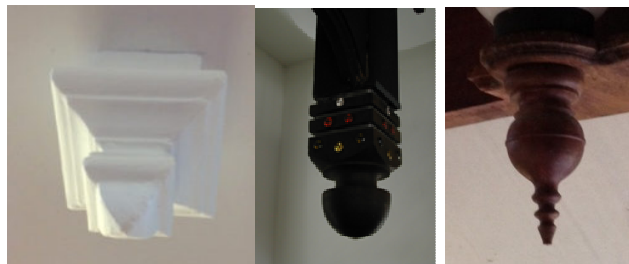


Figure 15: Adaptive design of *Buah Butung*

vi. *Pintu Gerbang*: As shown in Fig 16, *pintu gerbang* design can be adapted in the design of contemporary doors or gate of buildings.



Figure 16: Adaptive design of *Pintu Gerbang* in contemporary gate

- vii. *Tebuk Tembus*: This carved design can be placed at the entrance of room for ventilation and lighting purposes. It can either be direct application (Fig. 17a) or adaptive application (Fig. 17b).



Figure 17a: Direct application



Figure 17b: Adaptive application

- viii. *Dinding Janda Berhias*: This wall decorative panel can be adapted in contemporary homes (Fig. 18). However, when adapting the design pattern, the ratio must be maintained to ensure the aesthetic is reserved and sustained.



Figure 18: Adaptive application of *Dinding Janda Berhias*

- ix. *Pemeleh* and *Tebar Layar*: The gable roof design (*tebar layar*) and the pair of timber at the fascia ends (*pemeleh*) can be applied in contemporary roofing as shown in Fig. 19 below.

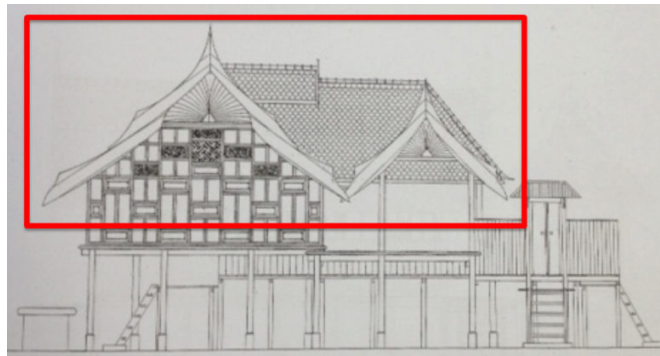


Figure 19: Application of *Pemeleh* and *Tebar Layar*

x. *Anjung*: Both the external and internal contemporary space can be addressed by introducing adaptive side and top openings as illustrated in Fig. 20 below. This will enhance ventilation and lighting in the building.



Figure 20: Introduction of adaptive side and top openings

Conclusion

The elements of traditional aesthetics can play a significant role in maintaining the identity of the local architecture. Uniqueness appearing on these elements can be regarded as a factor of global players which only have its own identity and not available elsewhere. Therefore, the correct use of aesthetics could very well play a role in emotional well-being and thus, compensating for the quality of life. In the light of this, this paper has been able to identify ten (10) elements of traditional aesthetic values in Kelantan, and also illustrates by examples how these elements can be applied in architecture of contemporary homes.

Recommendation

Based on this study, further research can be done on regional traditional building elements to establish local identity, thus classifying classical design and adaptive or innovative design to their respective standing. Also, regional architectural elements can be introduced as *genius loci* in order to create architectural identity for global positioning of Malaysia. Furthermore, efforts should be put to establish a body of knowledge pertaining to regional architectural elements and be the integral part of the Malaysian architecture curriculum.

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