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A STUDY OF THE KELANTAN MALAY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: RECENT TRENDS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Sheffield for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**



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ABSTRACT

Due to the scale of recent development and rapid urbanisation in Kelantan, Malaysia, there is a general lack of understanding and appreciation of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. This PhD research was undertaken in order to identify the characteristics and identity of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. Through this improved understanding, it is hoped to better respect the heritage in contemporary planning and landscape design. The investigation highlights the authentic traditional elements that the inherited landscape can offer to contemporary planners, landscape architects, and municipal administrators in order to preserve the integrity and the beauty of the Kelantan Malay landscape. The search for the Kelantan Malay regional identity is quite a complicated endeavour both because of the diverse causes of change, and the difficulties in obtaining references and documentation about the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. There is an urgent and imperative task to secure the future of the authentic Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. Basically, Kelantan is being becoming acknowledged as a cradle of Malay cultures since most of the traditional Malay cultures can be found there. Traditional arts and culture are crucial to regional identity and, significantly, their vernacular qualities also play a vital role in creating the beauty of the cultural landscape. They have their own expression in architecture and landscape that could be identified as unique within the Malay Archipelago. The study will also consider the Kelantan traditional Malay house, the village, and the landscape elements of the capital city of Kota Bharu. This research will also look into the influences from other landscape traditions in creating the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. These include the early stage of Kelantan, during the Hindu-Buddhist era, the philosophy and culture of the Islamic era, Siamese influence, British colonial influence, and the period after Independence in 1957. In addition, this research will look into the approaches that have been used by Kota Bharu Municipal Council in creating the new landscape, especially in the city centre. At the same time the process of creating the regional identity will be considered. Kota Bharu, as an Islamic city, represents a symbolic trademark to the urban development of the Islamic state of Kelantan. It appears that there have been many changes in the cultural landscape of Kelantan, especially in the traditional villages and the city centre, that have gradually been transformed. In an important sense, recent new building and new urban development have transformed the cultural landscape either in a traditional matter or in a





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pastiche way. This thesis recognises the importance of incorporating the existing heritage alongside contemporary design. This research also seeks to consider the future prospects for the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape since there are many evolutions currently underway. Optimistically, there will be better landscape practices in the future, as well as further research on the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape.



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Chapter One : INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

This thesis is a study of nature of and challenges facing the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. Kelantan is a state of Malaysia (Figure 1.1) which is renowned for its traditional arts and culture as well as having distinctive traditional vernacular landscape and architecture. Principally, the study focuses on recent trends affecting landscape design and urban planning issues in Kelantan and the future prospects for its cultural landscape. The study concentrates on the Malay community in Kelantan which contributes a variety of arts and cultures to the state of Kelantan and Malaysia in general. This first chapter starts by setting out the importance of research and reasons for study. Subsequently, it is followed by the scope of work and the research questions and objectives. The chapter concludes by presenting an outline of the structure of the thesis.

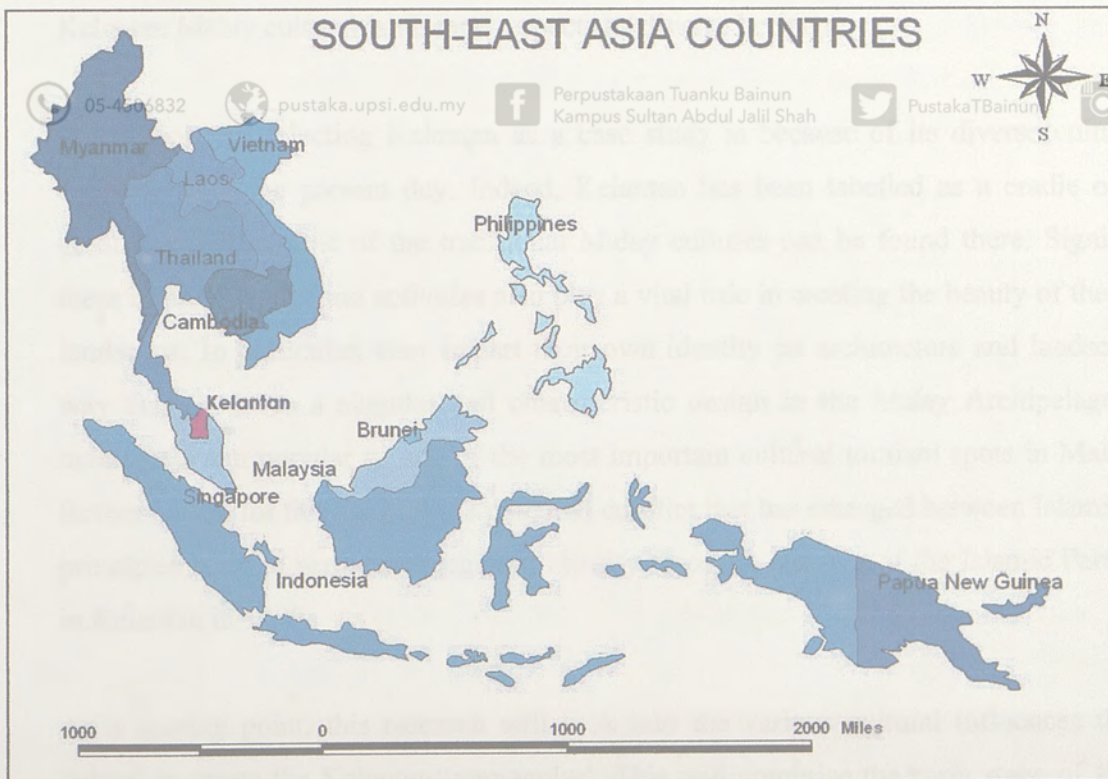


Figure 1.1. Location of Kelantan, Malaysia. (Source: GIS lab, Geography Department, UPSI)





1.1. The Importance of This Research

Due to the recent development of and rapid urbanisation in Kelantan, there is a need for improved understanding and appreciation of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape among practitioners and citizens. This thesis seeks to identify the characteristics and identities of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape, as a basis for informing the planning and design of landscape in the future. The investigation highlights the traditional elements that the former cultural landscape can offer to contemporary planners, landscape architects, and municipal administrators in their endeavours to conserve, in an authentic way, the integrity and the beauty of the Kelantan Malay landscape. The search for a Kelantan Malay regional identity is complex because there have been many recent changes and a lack of documentation about the traditional Kelantan Malay landscape. Currently there are many new landscape developments and new urbanisation schemes that introduce various design concepts to the cultural landscape. There is an urgent and imperative task to ensure that the future of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape respects its diverse heritage.



The reason for selecting Kelantan as a case study is because of its diverse cultures that continue until the present day. Indeed, Kelantan has been labelled as a cradle of Malay cultures because most of the traditional Malay cultures can be found there. Significantly, these traditional arts and activities also play a vital role in creating the beauty of the cultural landscape. In particular, they impart their own identity on architecture and landscape in a way that produces a singular and characteristic design in the Malay Archipelago. These make Kelantan popular as one of the most important cultural tourism spots in Malaysia. A further reason for this study is the potential conflict that has emerged between Islamic design principles and the vernacular regional identity since the election of the Islamic Party (PAS) in Kelantan in 1990.

As a starting point, this research will look into the various cultural influences that have helped to create the Kelantan 'vernacular'. This will comprise the early stage of Kelantan, during the Hindu-Buddhist era, the philosophy and culture of the Islamic era, the Siamese



influence, the British colonial phase, and the period after Independence in 1957. Every period has its own characteristics, and these have made the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape so unique and esteemed. The influences can be witnessed throughout the vernacular designs and the motifs that currently still exist.

In addition, this research will look into the approaches that have been used by the Municipal Council of the capital city, Kota Bharu, in new landscape developments, especially in the city centre. Kota Bharu, as an Islamic city, represents a symbolic icon in the urban development of the Islamic state of Kelantan. There have been many changes in the cultural landscape of Kelantan, and the traditional villages and the city centre have gradually transformed day by day. Recent new construction and new urban development have changed the cultural landscape, sometimes in ways that have appeared faithful to the traditional matter, and sometimes in ways that appear 'pastiche'. The research recognises that the cultural landscape should not simply be preserved, but that ways should be found of utilising the existing together with contemporary design.

This research also intends to distinguish the prospects for the future Kelantan Malay cultural landscape, building upon the multiple historical influences in the evolution of the cultural landscape. Optimistically, there will be some improved landscape practices that reinforce and extend the regional identity of the 'Kelantan Malay'.

1.2. Scope of The Research

The scope of the research comprises an exploration of the current approaches to planning and designing cultural landscape in Kelantan and the influences of traditional styles, materials and activities on design. In this research, cultural landscape refers to the vernacular landscape that has evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape. Through the social or cultural practices of an individual, family or a community, the landscape reflects the physical, biological, and cultural character of those everyday lives. This is a rather more specific view of 'cultural landscape' than might be used in geography or fine arts, for example, and looks particularly at the ways in which people






1.3. Research Questions

The research study focuses on three key questions:

- 1.3.1. What have been the influences on the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape?
- 1.3.2. What are the current landscape design approaches in Kelantan, and how sensitive are they to the heritage?
- 1.3.3. What are the future prospects for the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape?

1.4. Research Objectives

The first objective of this study is to identify the elements, characteristics, history and influences of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape. The study will discuss the influences from several eras, namely, the Islamic, Siamese and Western colonial eras.

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The second objective of this study will to examine cases where recent practices of landscape planning illustrate ways in which the cultural landscape has been incorporated or disregarded. Correspondingly, the current landscape approaches by the municipal council will be analysed in detail.

Finally, the study will contribute constructive ideas for improved practices towards the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape as well as recommend and develop principles and guidelines that can be used in practices which are more respectful towards the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape.

1.5. Thesis Structure and Rationale

The thesis centres on Kelantan Malay as an internationally significant cultural landscape that derives much of its importance from the mingling of cultural influences over many

centuries. However, the nature of this cultural landscape resource has not been properly documented, and so the thesis seeks to provide a profile of its key attributes and trends. Further, current approaches towards landscape planning and design in the region are under-developed, which is a serious matter in the light of the strong drivers of change which could lead to the irreversible loss of cultural landscape distinctiveness. The drivers of change are both exogenous (from outside) such as globalisation and Islamisation, and endogenous (from within) such as migration from the villages to the city.

In this regard, the state and municipal government are pursuing a policy of Islamisation which means a conscious alteration of urban imagery and public realm. At the same time, the traditional legacy is highly valued, although its imagery and belief systems are sometimes in conflict with religious orthodoxy. It is also vulnerable to the imposition of international architectural styles. Hence, this thesis responds to a need to document the nature of the resource, and to propose some educational and policy responses.

This thesis includes surveys and interviews that aim to discern whether new changes in the cultural landscape are authentic or inauthentic, or sympathetic or conflictual. It reflects on existing legislation and guidelines and questions whether these should be reinforced.

The thesis is organised into ten chapters and begins with an introduction to the research study. This chapter focuses on the importance of the research and the significance of the study. The chapter also illustrates the scope of the study and the research questions, and provides a concise view about the whole thesis in general.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature, drawing upon several subject areas concerning issues about the cultural landscape in general, and the Kelantan Malay landscape in particular.

Chapter 3 provides the background study of Kelantan, Malaysia and some of the issues concerning Kelantan Malay cultural landscapes.



Chapter 4 sets out the methodology in detail, particularly the mixed methods approach that was used to gather information in the field. The chapter also describes the analysis process used to interpret the data.

Chapter 5 discusses the background to the case study in Kelantan.

Chapter 6 reports the case study findings from the analysis of documents and information provided by the local municipal council.

Chapter 7 presents the analysis and findings of visual observation of selected sites in the case study area.

Chapter 8 presents the analysis and findings from the interviews with key informants in the case study areas.

Chapter 9 provides a discussion of the findings from the preceding analyses and concludes with a summary.



Chapter 10 presents the overall conclusions of the thesis. The chapter ends with some recommendations on better ways of implementing contemporary designs and developments in ways that respect the local traditions. In addition, some suggestions for future research will be made.

1.6 Conclusion

The study of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape is particularly important in view of its distinctive contribution to Malay heritage. This thesis seeks to provide a basis for new approaches to landscape planning that show greater respect for the traditional vernacular landscape. Islamic principles and modernism are important factors that currently impinge on traditional elements, for example, the inclusion of Arabic script and geometric arabesque patterns. Although some of the key influences are external, this is merely the continuation of a





historical trend, and adapting from other landscape approaches can contribute to the evolution and richness of designs in Kelantan. The issue is whether or not they display acceptable degrees of authenticity and sympathy.

This study of the Kelantan Malay cultural landscape addresses two main themes, namely: the lack of an existing account of the elements that contribute to this landscape; and a lack of awareness/action regarding trends that are diminishing this heritage. The study aims to explore the traditional elements in Kelantan Malay cultural landscape that can potentially be used to improve present approaches to the development of landscape and public realm in Kelantan. It is proposed that, although new development should still proceed apace, it should respect the sense of place of Kelantan, its history, built heritage and traditional characteristics. Presently, many cross-cultural influences are manifest in Kelantan especially in Kota Bharu city centre, where there is a varied mixture of traditional, Eastern and Western elements. This research seeks to provide a stepping stone for improved development of the contemporary Kelantan Malay vernacular landscape in the future.

