

The Influence of Religion towards Local Architecture Elements: Comparison Study of Thailand and Malaysia Wood Carvings

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Abstract. Thailand and Malaysia, have experienced a very close cultural contact from each other since long time ago.. Therefore, those both countries' history had pointed out that this area have undergone various influence from various factors especially from different ethnic and religion aspect. Religion factor have give deep impact towards in daily life and culture of the society. This study will touch architectural elements in Thailand and Malaysia which is focus into the influence of religion in wood carving arts in those country. Wood carving art has been long trudge in this region. This art, has undergone various influence which is parallel with time. Those wood carving art has undergone evolution following changes of time. Hence, the aim of this study is to identify how deep the religion have influence local wood carving art. The influence will be identify in terms of motifs, the philosophy and the usage of the product. In order to achieve the prime aims as outlined above, the objective of this paper is to differentiate between Thailand and Malaysia wood carving in terms of Buddhism and Islamic influence aspect. During this research, information has been acquired through primary and secondary data. The primary data which is has been collected through interview and observation in Malaysia and Thailand, also has been completed together with literature review. Documentation has been done at the site visit in order to compare the data between Malaysia and Thailand. The comparison data has been analyzed to get the best findings at the end. The finding of this research are Thai wood carving use many animals and religion myth motif compared to Malay wood carving. Meanwhile, Malay woodcarving have rejected animals and human motifs due to Islamic rules. In Malay wood carving, Islamic art have influenced Malay Muslim carvers in producing more geometric motif which is usually has been produce together with calligraphy and flora motifs.

Keywords: Thailand and Malaysia, wood carving art, influence, differentiate, impact

1. Introduction

Malaysia and Thailand have a very close and unique relationship. In fact, until 1909, the Northern Peninsular Malaysia States namely Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis sent the triennial Bunga Emas (Golden Flower Tree) as a tribute to Bangkok,(Kitjar Sukjaidee,2005). The spread of Islam in Southeast Asia can be said to have several theories. The arrival of Islam through trade has exist since before 13th century. Port on the coast of peninsular Malaysia, eastern Sumatra, the northern island of Java have been identified to be an important during 7th and 8th century. Materials such as aromatic wood and spices has been a major items which involves China, India and the Mediterranean region,(International World History Project,2011).

Missionary activity also plays a fairly important at that time. Missionaries who had arrived via merchant ships had spread Islamic teachings and beliefs to the local people. As a result of missionary activities, they managed to spread Islam to the local rulers. At the end of the 13th century is the moment in which several small ports in northern Sumatra was dominated by Islam. From here, Islam has spread to peninsular Malaysia. Malacca Sultanate was the starting point of Islam is widely spread throughout the Malay archipelago. Buddhism have influenced Thailand by three major ways. Firstly, from Sri Lanka. Secondl, from Cambodia during Sukhothai era. Lastl, from folk religion influence. From this three major ways, Buddhism have developed a very strong foundation and give serious impact into Thai's people culture(Wikipedia,2012).

2. Objective

The aim of this research are mainly to check and identify how deep religion have give impact towards local wood carvings art. The objective is as follows.

- To differentiate between Thailand and Malaysia wood carving in terms of Buddhism and Islamic influence aspect.

3. Scope and Limitation

3.1. Scope

The scope of this research is focussed to building architectural elements in Thailand and Malaysia which is focus into the influence of religion in wood carving arts in those country. The building will be residential, palace, temple, mosque, tomb and others.

3.2. Limitation

During this research conduct,there are several limitation have involved. There were:

- Having difficulties during documentation at the site. Some of the building structures are difficult to reach and the documentation of those structures are limited.
- The scope of the area are quite broad so not all places have visited.

4. Methodology

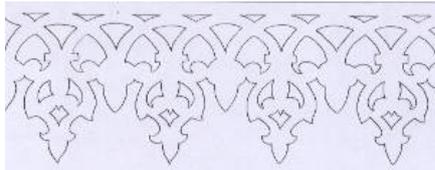
This study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The first primary data used is observation and interview. The observation and documentation has been done in Thailand and Malaysia. All selected buildings has been observed and documented based on the research needs. The interview sessions has been held in Terengganu, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand in order to study the basic knowledge of wood carvings. The secondary data is depends on literature review which is has been done at Thailand Creative and Design Center(TCDC), Chulalongkorn University and in Malaysia. The secondary data will support the primary data due to the difficulties of documentation at the site.

5. Findings and discussion

Table 1: The comparison of wood carving between Malaysia and Thailand.

	Malaysia	Thailand
Motif	a)Fauna  <p>Plat 1: Gagak Sura bird motif use for royal event. The mythical creatures such as the garuda, the God's vehicle according to local faith before Islam. Source: Site visit(2009)</p> <p>After the invasion of Islam in the region, all Hindu-Buddhist animals motifs were eliminated. Animals motif that have been selected were modified wisely and has been produce in abstract way.</p>	a)Fauna  <p>Plat 2: Zodiac motif, such as horse and snake. An elephant motif also can be found. Source: Nithi and Brian(2006)</p> <p>Animal motif that is frequently carved was dragon, garuda, bird, elephant, deer and four-legged animals such as dog and horse, (Naengnoi and Somchai,1993).</p>

b)Flora



Plat 3: Bamboo shoots motif.
Source: Muzium Negara (1974)

Malays were more concerned about the flora motif because Islam prohibits the use of animal motifs. Before, the Malay carvers inspired by plants that grow around their house or carving place. Sometimes, the plant motif is the plants were taken from not important or unknown species at all. However, the creativity of the carvers have made the carvings more interesting.

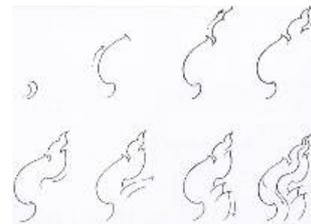
Sometimes selected plants motif contain nutritional and aesthetic features. And, some of these plants are planted around the house, (Kraftangan Malaysia,2009).

b)Flora



Plat 4: Flora design in Chiang Mai. Source: Nithi and Brian(2006)

Consist of flower plant, leaf which is usually composed in various cinder form(kranok motif). This kranok motif is very well-known and has been used quite long time. This kranok motif have already exist since before Sukhothai era. The origin of this motif was believed from China with influenced of Khmer elements,(Nithi and Brian,2006).



Plat 5: Step how to draw kranok motif.
Source: M.Graham (1996)

c)Calligraphy



Plat 6: This back rest is belong to the Sultan Mohammed IV, Kelantan, on the date 1896. The calligraphy meant 'This boat is owned by the Kelantan Ruler, the son of the late Sultan Muhammad. Source: Muzium Negara (1974)

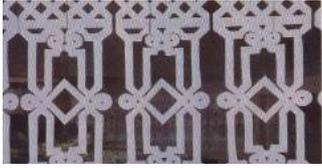
Once accepted by the Malay Muslims in the region, the carvers has been actively producing artwork featuring Islamic art. Calligraphy continued to place among the carvers and often worked together - with the flora and geometric motifs. Usually this calligraphy has a meaning and sometimes the message is for public public,(Kraftangan Malaysia,2009). However, the message is depend on the function and location of the carving.

c)Religion



Plat 7: Kinnorn(a), Hamsa(b) and Dragon(c) motif. Source: Nithi and Brian (2006).

In Thai society, motif usage from religion myth are extremely use and very close to Thai socio-cultural society. Woodcarver have adapt from Buddha Life story and Jataka fictitious,(Nithi and Brian,2006). They also use epic from Thai-Hindu Ramakian. Dragon motifs are among the most widely used form religious myth. Besides the dragon, there are myths of swan(Hamsa) in the carvings. But some carvings have shown the combination of two different species of 'guardian' such as motif of kinnorn, the combination of

		humans and birds.
	<p>d)Geometry</p>  <p>Plat 8: Geometric pattern. Source: MTIB (1990)</p> <p>This geometric motifs continue to grow in line with the acceptance of the Malays to Islam. When animals motives are not allowed, the carvers begin to apply the geometric patterns in the carving. Usually, this geometric motifs combined with calligraphic motifs. However, there are also geometric motifs combined with flora. Geometric motifs use Islamic geometry was found in mosque, tombs, palaces and houses.</p>	<p>d)Geometry</p>  <p>Plat 9 : Swastika motif, influence from China. Source: Nithi and Brian (2006).</p> <p>Geometric motifs are more influenced from China. When Thai run very close diplomatic relations with China, many China geometric pattern has taken. However, the amount of geometric motifs in Thailand is less than the motif of religious myth.</p>
	<p>e)Cosmos</p>  <p>Plat 10: Kedah traditional house in Langkawi Island. Source: Site Visit (2009)</p> <p>This pattern use natural elements like sun, moon, stars, clouds move, the hills, waves, and so on. Sun and star motif is often used in gable ends.</p>	
Philosophy	<p>Malay wood carving is totally use Islamic principle and philosophy as a core elements in producing the wood carving products. So, all Hindu-Buddhist animals motifs were eliminated. Besides, Malay daily life also have influence the basis of wood carving philosophy.</p>	<p>Thai wood carving motif have use religion myth aggressively and there also very close to Thai socio-cultural society. The wood carving have use many Hindu-Buddhist animals motif..</p>
Usage	<p>Malay wood carving widely used as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure components either at the residential, mosque, commercial buildings, administration buildings, palace etc. • tombs, • furnitures, equipments • panel decorations 	<p>Thai wood carving also used as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure components either at the residential, wat/temple, commercial buildings, administration buildings, palace etc. • tombs • furnitures, equipments • panel decorations

From above comparison data(Table 1), we can conclude that:

- Thai wood carving use many form of animal and religion myth motifs compare to Malay wood carving in terms of religion influence. Thai people more adore this motifs due to their strong practice and belief into some certain spirits and also for their guardians. But, Malay wood carving is totally rejected the form of animals and human in their work. Malay community would prefer to use calligraphy instead of using animals motifs. This is due to prohibited by Islam practice. Calligraphy widely use in terms of advice, lesson, reminder, law, prayer and so on. Normally calligraphy use to disseminate information to public.
- In Malay wood carving, the geometry motif more related to Islamic pillar. For each different number of corner for the certain geometric shape will representing certain Islamic pillar. But, in Thai wood carving the geometry shape is not related to Buddhist practice.
- The cosmos motif in Thai wood carving is not in high demand compared to Malay wood carving. In Malay wood carving the cosmos motif is still practice due to old belief to certain spirit. But, the perception of those cosmos motifs has been changed since Islam influenced in this region.

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