

# The Education and Research of Islamic Art in the Mosques in Bangkok, Thailand

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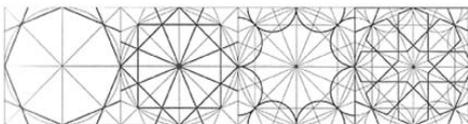
**Abstract.** The purpose of this research is to identify Islamic Art that appearances in the mosques in Bangkok which are related to the styles of each concept behind their structure. A framework was applied using qualitative research methods; Thai Muslims with dynamic roles in Islamic culture were interviewed. In addition, a field survey of 40 selected mosques from 175 mosques in Bangkok was studied. Data analysis will be according to the pattern of each of their concept. The identification of Islamic Art in the Mosques in Bangkok are 1) The concept of Thai local living: with Thai traditional art style and Government policy. 2) The concept of the ethnological identity: with the traditional culture of each ethnicity of Thai Muslims. 3) The concept of the nostalgia identity: with Islamic and Arabian conservative style. 4) The concept of the new identity: with Neo – Classic, Modern and rational style.

**Keywords:** Islamic Art, Mosque in Bangkok, Local Wisdom, Art Education and Research

## 1. Introduction

In 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic religion was introduced into Thailand during the Sukhothai Kingdom (1257 to 1350 A.D.) and prospered during the following Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350 to 1767 A.D.) Two century later Islam was established as a minority faith with an estimated 6 million believers. [1] Popular opinion seems to hold that a vast Muslim minority is found in the three southern provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. However, research from the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that only 18% of Thai Muslims live in those three provinces. The rest are scattered throughout Thailand, with the largest concentrations being in Bangkok and throughout most of the Southern provinces. According to the National Statistics Office, Muslims in Southern Thailand in 2005 made up 30.4% of the general population above the age of 15, while less than 3% in other parts of the country,

The Qur'an never directly mentions to the art. But ever refers to the beauty which God created. [2] The essential of Qur'an was related to the way of life and mind in good. The Goodness was symbolized with all beautiful and created things. Muslims were applying it to lead a valuable life with intelligence and faith. Value, function, systematic and reason are priority for Islamic designers to represent the beauty within the mosques, to symbolize their life style. The Muslim character is represented by three main structures of design: Arabesque, Geometric Form and Arabian Calligraphy; as on Fig. 1. [3]



دِيَوَانُ الْخَطِّ الْعَرَبِيِّ

Fig. 1: The elements of Islamic art

The mosque represented the house of God, as community and symbol of Islam. [4] Muslims focused on the mosque and use Islamic art as the embodiment of beauty; as on Fig. 2. The octagon pattern floor plan was representative of Islamic Art during the first Islamic era in Damascus. There are a number of poles, fountain on the square that is remembrance of God. The mosque also reflects the lifestyle and culture. It was represented Muslims' characteristic vary by geography and ethnicity.

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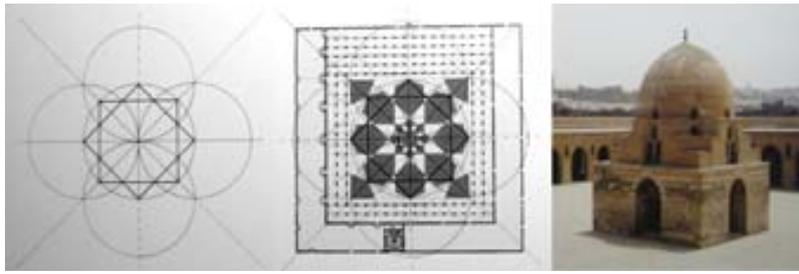


Fig. 2: The use of Geometric form

Many Thai mosques were built with Thai traditional architecture and decorated with Thai traditional art. The main stream of Islamic art in Thailand has been inherited from India - Persian and Java - Malayan. These are two lines of Arabian civilizations that mixed with local ethnic cultures. [5] Islamic art and Thai art demonstrate a similar pattern. The examples are pattern of Flora fall, pattern of Rice bush and pattern of Western Pudtan: the pattern of the Thai flower mixed with Islamic floral, the flowing line of an ivy plant branching out and the idealized intertwining pattern of leaves and flowers. Then join to the end with Kankhot pattern: Thai vector with curved line and animal head end; as on Fig. 3. That has a bunch of vine winding around the arcs. Other example of Thai art is Krahnok Kankhot: the head of animal join with flame pattern in Thai art. This species is similar to Persian woven rugs and carpets from India.



Fig. 3: Thai traditional art with Islamic art

Throughout 400 years of Thai mosques they were built with 4 difference concepts: the concept of Thai local living, the concept of the ethnological identity, the concept of the nostalgia identity and the concept of the new identity. [6] Each concept formed with Muslims' lifestyle and culture varies by geography and ethnography.

## 2. Methodology

This research intends to identify the difference of Islamic art in Bangkok Mosques within the concepts. Thai Muslims with dynamic roles in Islamic culture were interviewed. In addition, a field survey of 40 selected mosques from 175 mosques in Bangkok. Data analysis was based on the characteristics from each period.

### 2.1. Conceptual Framework

The Framework of this research was based on 3 words; as on Fig. 4. First is Islamization: the principles of Islam, the beauty of God. Second is Localization: the life and culture in Thailand, the environmental effect. Third is Globalization [7]: the visual communication and sign recognition of all Muslims.



Fig. 4: Conceptual Framework

### 3. Results

Overall, the findings of this research reveal that the Mosques in Bangkok were built under the 4 concepts according to the circumstance of society. Since the late Ayutthaya period to early Rattanakosin period, the Mosque was under the patronage from the government. Thai traditional art was selected during this period. Then the Muslims from around Thailand immigrated to Bangkok and brought their local art and blended it to Thai style. After the end of Islamic Empire in the Middle East, the Arabian styles have been evident to Thai Mosque. The last is the way that Muslims maintain their identity with the adjustment to the new world. Detail of all concepts as following:

#### 3.1. The concept of Thai local living

Thai art was mainstream art in this period; Mosques in Bangkok were constructed under the patronage from Muslim government officer. Government policy were accepted from all Thai Muslims and shown in Thai traditional structure. There are many of Mosques within Thai traditional architecture inside and outside; as on Fig. 5. High gable roof with full decoration in low-relief embossed Stucco and sculpture. Mimbar and Mihrab: site where the Imam performs Salat formed with Arabian Calligraphy and Geometric pattern. This Islamic art has been applied to wall tile and arch.



Fig. 5: Islamic art with Thai local living

#### 3.2. The concept of the ethnological identity

Asian folk art was mainstream art in this period, Mosques in Bangkok were constructed under the patronage from immigrant Muslim from Malaysia, Indonesia and India. The architecture of Mosque depends on geography and ethnography. The Indonesian Mosque shown on Java style, The Malaysian Mosque has a Malayan style and The Indian Mosque has a Mugal style; as on Fig. 6. Their inside has an Arabian Calligraphy and Geometric pattern especially in Mimbar and Mihrab. There is no Thai art ever seen from this concept. Star and moon sign appeared in Thailand from this period.



Fig. 6: Islamic art with Asian identity

#### 3.3. The concept of the nostalgia identity

Arabian art and Persian art were mainstream art in this period; Mosques in Bangkok were constructed under the patronage from trader Muslim from Iran and India. The extravagance of the Mosque depended on the prosperity of patron. Many of Thai Muslims were graduated from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkish. They received religious education based on an intensive Islamic identity that stood in the Middle East for several centuries and brought this cultural heritage to Thailand; as on Fig. 7. In general, Mosque's structure was similar to an Arabian Mosque with Arabian Calligraphy, Arabesque and Geometric form. Some Mosque

intends to emulate the Mosque Esfahan of Iran. Gorgeously decorated may be dazzlingly in the charm of Arabian art.



Fig. 7: Islamic art with Arabian identity

### 3.4. The concept of the new identity

Neo – Classic and Contemporary art were mainstream art in this period, Mosques in Bangkok construct under concept of modernization. Several Mosques look like Classic era building, others feel modern and have a western look; as on Fig. 8. Islamic art still exists inside but more gorgeous with a dazzling golden peel in Arabian Calligraphy, Arabesque and Geometric forms. Mimbar and Mihrab maintain to the original heritage. There is Western Arabesque: Arabian floral mixed with Art Nouveau style reveal in some Mosque which under patronage of Malayan Muslim.



Fig. 8: Islamic art with identity of new era

## 4. Conclusions

Islamic Art appearances in the mosques in Bangkok with 4 concepts: 1) The concept of Thai local living. 2) The concept of the ethnological identity. 3) The concept of the nostalgia identity. 4) The concept of the new identity. Each concept was dominated with 3 Axis; Islamization: the principles of Islam, Localization: the life and culture in Thailand and Globalization: the visual communication and sign recognition.

## 5. Acknowledgements

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