

**THE STUDY OF MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN SARAWAK UNDER THE
LEADERSHIP OF PEHIN SRI HAJI ABDUL TAIB MAHMUD**



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Contents

1. Letter of Report Submission	iii
2. Letter of Offer (Research Grant)	iv
3. Acknowledgements	v
4. Enhanced Research Title and Objectives	vi
5. Report	1
5.1 Proposed Executive Summary	1
5.2 Enhanced Executive Summary	2
5.3 Introduction	3
5.3.1 Background of Mosques in Sarawak	3
5.3.2 Roles and Functions of a Mosque	5
5.3.3 Statement of the Problem	6
5.3.4 Objectives of the Study	7
5.3.5 Significance of the Study	7
5.3.6 Research Limitation	8
5.3.7 Definition of Terms/Concepts	8
5.3.8 Conclusion	9
5.4 Brief Literature Review	10
5.4.1 Mosques as Places of Worship	10
5.4.2 Other Social Functions of Mosques	11
5.4.3 Mosque Area Utilisation	11
5.4.4 Mosque Architecture	12
5.4.5 Mosques in Sarawak	13
5.4.6 Conclusion	14
5.5 Methodology	15
5.5.1 Research Method	15
5.5.2 Mosque Population and Categories in Sarawak	15
5.5.3 Selection of Sample Mosques	15
5.5.4 Photographic study	17
5.5.5 Conclusion	17
5.6 Results and Discussion	18
5.6.1 Classification of Styles and Architecture of Mosques in Sarawak	18
5.6.2 Descriptive Presentation of Mosque Architectural Design in Sarawak	18
5.6.2.1 Traditional Vernacular Design	18
5.6.2.2 Modern Vernacular Design	20

5.2 Enhanced Executive Summary

This study is a photographic documentation of 38 mosques with fine design concepts and architectural styles in Sarawak which were built and reconstructed under the leadership of the Chief Minister Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud. The main objective of the study is to identify the design concepts and architectural styles of the selected mosques, through the eyes of ordinary writers and photographers. This study used photographic documentation method, observations and interviews. Over a span of 30 years (1983-2012), the building of mosques and their reconstruction in Sarawak were remarkably undertaken. The data and physical findings indicated that the construction of mosques in the State has grown from humble wooden building structures to big modern buildings with well-planned utilities, high ceilings and floor space that can cater to a growing volume of worshippers. On the design concepts and architectural styles, the 38 mosques exhibit Traditional Vernacular, Modern Vernacular, Modernistic and Post Modern Revivalism styles. The study adapts the classification of architectural styles of mosques as set up by Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi (2007). Fulfilling one of the main functions of mosques, the mosques in the study were used for congregational prayers and as places to commemorate certain Islamic celebrations. However, the true spirit and value of these institutions as educational centres and centres for learning have yet to be fully utilised as there seems to be a lack of educational activities like religious classes or *kulliah*. There is a danger that this may lead to a society of Muslims that lacks Islamic knowledge and practices.

5.3 Introduction

5.3.1 Background of Mosques in Sarawak

Sarawak has a land area of 124,450 square kilometres, roughly the size of Peninsular Malaysia. There are about 700,000 Muslims out of a population of 2,500,000 people (Population Census 2010). The first mosque in Sarawak was a wooden hut built on stilt on the bank of Sarawak River built before 1839. Kuching was then a small town of less than 800 inhabitants, most of them Malays (Sanib Said, 1998). Before Independence, mosques in Sarawak were generally small and they were built with simple material of wood and nipah palm leaves from the limited fund collected from the community and well wishers. After Independence, government machineries and developments attracted all communities, including the Malays and Melanaus who are Muslims to move to towns as workers in the public and private sectors. The old divisional mosques and district mosques were simply too small for Friday prayers. From 1963 to 1983, divisional mosques were rebuilt first in Kuching (1968), followed by Limbang (1972), Sri Aman (1980), Sibu (1980), Sarikei (1983), and Miri (1983). Their roof tops were all designed with domes, and minarets were erected either on the building edges or as stand-alone structures.

In the last 30 years (1983-2012), mosque buildings in Sarawak have gone through rapid development and uplift. Almost one or two new mosques of budget around RM1 million were built each year, accredited to the fast pace of economic development and good governance of Muslim affairs under the leadership of the Chief Minister Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud. The same period witnessed more than half of the mosques were constructed with pyramidal tiered roofs, departing from the dome and minaret period (1963-1983) and reverting to the style of the 1852 Masjid Besar Kuching and its predecessor.

After Independence but more prominently in the last 30 years, Sarawak skyline was introduced to unique concepts and styles in mosque buildings, demonstrating improved economic status and the advancement in building technology and engineering. Behind the building of mosques, apart from their physical outlook, architecture and styles, there are historical,

5.4 Brief Literature Review

Mosque is one of the most predominant and concrete symbols of the existence of Islam in any place. The English word “mosque” is derived from the Arabic word *masjid*, which means “place of prostration (*sujud*)” or bowing down to Allah. Prostration is understood as the prayer’s (solat) highpoint which symbolises the utter submission and surrender of the human being to Allah (SWT). Also frequently referred to as the houses of Allah (SWT) by the Muslims, there are various mentions of the mosques and the merits associated with them in the Holy Quran and Hadith.

Theoretically the existence of mosques in Islam requires nothing more than marking the direction of prayers and as such in the olden days, the construction of the early mosques in the Muslim world served only that conventional purpose, not as a means to glorify and raise the profile of Islam. As the early traders and missionaries who spread Islam to this region were religious teachers, not building experts or architects, the buildings that were used as mosques or *surau* in the early days were just simple houses which resembled a house architecturally (Abdul Halim Nasir, 2004). However, with the progression of Islam and the Islamic community, coupled with the advancement in modern technology, the mosques have developed a number of rich and distinctive Islamic design concepts and architectural forms. Their social and functional roles have also expanded in tandem with their progression and grandeur.

5.4.1 Mosques as Places of Worship

Prayer is universally accepted as one of the main reasons for the existence of mosques and the mentions of the merits of mosque and the places of worship in the Holy Quran and Hadith are plentiful. In one Hadith on the significance of mosque, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “Whoever builds Allah (SWT) a mosque, even though it be as the nest of a partridge, will have Allah (SWT) build a palace for him in the Garden”.