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Title : CALLIGRAPHIC WOODCARVING ORNAMENTATIONS IN SELECTED PENINSULAR MALAYSIAN MOSQUES

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Woodcarving is a form of Malaysian traditional art. After the advent of Islam in the Malay Peninsula in the 13th century (Pasai) and 14th century (Malacca), Islamic motifs such as calligraphic woodcarvings are added to the local art forms, particularly to embellish Malaysian mosques. Although Malaysian mosques have been built using three architectural styles, namely the vernacular, colonial and modern, the designers did not distinguish between the styles when installing calligraphic woodcarving ornamentations in the prayer halls. Furthermore, although many studies have been conducted to investigate the characteristics of Malaysian woodcarvings, findings on the opinions of mosque users are lacking. Hence, this thesis aims to identify the various forms of calligraphic woodcarving ornamentations through the analysis of their writing styles and other characteristics of this ornamentation from the selected peninsular Malaysian mosques. The objectives are: i) to establish the judgments of mosque users about calligraphic woodcarving ornamentations based on types of scripts, legibility, locations, function, aesthetic, desirability and combination of patterns; ii) to analyse the current calligraphic woodcarving ornamentation (writing styles, locations and contents) of Malaysian mosques; and iii) to propose recommendations on the appropriate design of calligraphic woodcarving ornamentations for Malaysian mosques. This study employed quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Five scripts - *Thuluth*, *Kufi*, *Naskh*, *Nastaliq* and *Divani*

and eight mosques in the North East and South West regions of Peninsula Malaysia were selected for the case studies. Firstly, the field study documented existing decorative woodcarving inscriptions in the mosques. Then, from the total number of 408 respondents, the assessments of mosque users on wood-carved calligraphy are conducted. The qualitative data are discussed comprehensively while SPSS is used to analyse the quantitative data of the questionnaire survey. The investigated variables included the locations, readability, aesthetic, function, mixture with other motifs and preference of scripts. The findings showed that calligraphy not only functions as ornamentation in a spiritual atmosphere, but also for recitations. *Thuluth* and *Kufi* are the most preferred scripts as decoration of mosques as woodcarving ornamental inscriptions. The users of mosques preferred individual inscriptions in terms of legibility while they desire to observe Arabic inscriptions to decorate *Mihrab*, *Mimbar* and entrances respectively. The designers preferred *Thuluth* scripts, but the selected contents did not follow the principle of connection between location and content of inscription. The study summarised design recommendations which will assist calligraphers, woodcarvers and designers of mosques to provide more desirable calligraphic woodcarving ornamentations for Malaysian mosques based on the users' assessments and the existing decorative inscriptions.