

THE RELATIONSHIP OF PERAK MALAY 'KAMPUNG' ELEMENTS TO THE MALAYSIAN GARDEN CONCEPT (MGC): IMPACT ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

'Kampung' is a place that is very closely related to the Malay community in Malaysia. It is a place the Malays adapt to their real life. The elements of landscape and garden that intend to be highlighted are found to be unattractive to designers. The image and identity of features are no longer a priority for the homeowners to inherit. The objective of this study is to identify the garden elements that abide by the Malaysian Garden Concept's (MGC) basic guidelines in the environment of traditional Perak 'kampung' houses. . This study emphasizes qualitative methods that lead to site observations and interviews. The study was conducted on 71 traditional houses in Perak. The findings indicate that most of the 'kampung' landscape elements do not significantly impact supporting guidelines by the National Landscape Department (NLD).

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Keywords: Malay Garden, Malaysian Garden, Identity, Kampung



INTRODUCTION

Perak is a state in Malaysia that is rich in culture and history. In the past, Perak Malays story had been recorded in many ancient manuscripts such as *Sulalatus Salatin* (The Malay Annals) and *Hikayat Misa Melayu* (The story of the Perak Sultanate). According to Nasir (2005), in ancient times, Malay kingdoms existed around the Nusantara region's river basin. It is well known that rivers were the main transportation routes (highway) during the days before the era of modernization. As history has it, two ancient kingdoms, namely 'Manjung' and 'Beruas,' were established near Sungai Dinding and Sungai Beruas. The people of these two kingdoms had inhabited along the river. However, if compared to the river condition in recent times, we will find that it is not the same as in the past (as described in the old Malay manuscripts). Nowadays, the rivers are narrowing. Its function has shifted to waterways (water transport is still available, but it is not the primary transport system at present). As time went by, the atmosphere of the 'kampung' also changed. For the Malay 'kampung' community in Perak, their life is no different from other places in Malaysia. Nowadays, it is not easy to get a traditional village without being influenced by modern elements. The changes can be seen clearly in their life and in the assimilation of various cultures by the Malays.

Today, the Malay community adores other lifestyles and marginalizes the traditional culture embraced by their ancestors. The examples of this can be seen in the establishment of gardens with iconography and identity such as the ones found in Chinese and Persian gardens. In general, the MGC is primarily based on the tropics of a geographical place. Because of its geographical position, the Balinese Garden design concept is equated with the Malay Garden idea. Compared to the Balinese-style island, the Malay Garden idea has a more influential philosophy in Islamic teachings. For example, the Malay garden must continue to display a genuine culture as the main attraction. A demonstration of local culture is a point of interest that could differentiate between the MGC and other established concepts.

The current situation has been challenging as when there is a rapid technological change, the unrestricted human interaction creates a 'pop culture' in the Malay community way of life. Various views and opinions were given on the definition of national identity by local and foreign



Figure 1. Among the Houses in the Traditional Malay 'kampung' that have been Visited.

(Source: Author, 2021)

philosophers. Hence, the development of identity in architecture is a long process; some of which remains as a culture of an ancient civilization. As a multiracial nation, Malaysia should think about implementing such a form of identity that needs to be carefully implemented (to avoid misunderstanding among the next generation). The interpretation requires exposure of cultural aspects of national identity by some local and foreign experts. The point of view has been interpreted to a lesser extent by most academics and professionals. In the end, we can see that the identity will encompass the architectural heritage and traditional landscape. Some experts highlight the social aspects that should be at the forefront of shaping Malaysia's future identity. And the role of community members is essential in supporting the development of that identity.

The NLD was established in 1996 to regulate landscapes worldwide based on the federal government's allocation. The nation architectural identity crisis has evolved over the past three decades. To this day, it has not been resolved by responsible parties. The architectural identity crisis has adversely affected the philosophical aspects of design and the entire Malaysian society. Today's society needs to understand their cultural identity, indirectly introducing and enhancing the country's uniqueness. Abu Bakar (2012) agrees that the multicultural and multiracial nation are the mediums that can shape the relationship between the people in the country. It will

occur when there is a combination of racial elements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive reading and searching were done on the subject matter of the study. More information on interpretation may foster cultural heritage to create national, regional, and local identities. There are some essential topics that need to be realised before initiating a study on traditional landscape elements which are discussed in the following subsections.

Home Garden Landscape Character

The home garden can be described as a farming system that combines various physical, social, and economic roles in the household land area. Besides, it is being used for the workplace, and indirectly the farm produces storage for the occupants. Home gardens promote social transformation and development. A home garden is indeed a gathering place for people and where children play as well. Galhena (2013) says house gardens are primarily found in small farming subsistence systems in rural and urban areas. The house garden is a small-scale production system that delivers non-recoverable, inexpensive, or readily available plants, animals, and functional foods, through retail, field-growing, hunting, fishing, and income. According to Zakaria et al. (2017), certain groups of people maintain their identity, especially the culture and tradition they have inherited over the years. Garden is identified as a court consisting of different plants for practical use by the Malays. Also, the planting is divided into different segments based on its role or usage for humans. The Malay house compound planting category can be divided into five: culinary, medical, ritual, cosmetic, aesthetic uses, and material utilization. The plants' intrinsic elements include shading, sense of welcoming, aesthetic, social activities, decorative, food, and healing purposes.

Kampung / Traditional Malay Village

Samsudin and Fitry (2014) state the traditional Malay 'kampung' is a settlement that has been inhabited more than a hundred (100) years ago and has very high regard for the architecture and culture of the Malays. 'Kampung' is a traditional settling of Malay communities in Malaysia over

the years and is usually found in rural areas. Amir et al. (2015) believe that rural areas should retain essential elements of their natural environment as people are more passionate about something incredibly unique from nature. Widodo (2020) mentions that the term 'kampung' usually refers to a settlement near the riverbank that turns into a landing point. Kampung's public area refers to spaces where anyone can enter and explore its surroundings, such as open fields, village streets, rivers, streams known as 'parit,' and the nearest woods. People use it for various activities freely without requiring any permission. The challenge is to encourage designers to produce quality design and increase creativity. We can recognize physical boundaries like fences or hedges, walls, ditches, or borders formed by mutual agreement identified in the home gardens.

National Landscape Identity Definition

According to Abu Bakar (2012), the NLD has chosen the Malay culture heritage as the core of national architectural identity development. It is seen as a continuation of Malay supremacy in the development of national culture. It is precisely the same as has been implemented in the National Language Policy, New Economic Policy, and others. After all, we need to solve the problem with the public's understanding of the national identity issues and goals. It will indirectly undermine the development of the identity that has been created. The National Landscape Policy (NLP) stresses the importance of building the Malaysian Garden using image and identity approaches.

Moreover, all this effort can promote a healthy and unique Malaysian identity globally (NLD, 2011). The public park that will be developed must have a Malaysian identity that considers the uniqueness of the natural environment and the community's common psychological needs.. It also needs to be aware of the changes that have taken place over time. The Malaysian Garden identity, which is the basis of the public park design, should be welcomed by all communities comprising different races.

Landscape Architecture Design

Clouston (1990) believes that landscape design must consist of the past and future criteria as a benchmark. By definition, a public park is a place for recreational and fun activities in a comfortable setting for

relaxation (to restore psychological and physical tension). Garden design can be summarized as factors that influence design decisions for consumer needs, community culture, technology, building materials, and landscape architecture philosophy. Culture is a complicated thing, and it involves many aspects of community structures. Today, Malaysia is a multiracial country, and the community certainly has different attitudes, customs, and understandings. Sometimes, this affects their leisure activities while in public parks. Harman Shah and Wahid (2010) point out that the primary distinction between traditional Malaysian society's approaches and that of Western culture is the implied character, which can be seen in terms of design aspects, including environmental design.

The Basic Formation of the Malaysian Garden Concept (MGC)

Zakaria et al. (2019) stress that we must seek the Malay Garden identity to understand the MGC as a whole. There are four basic formations of the MGC that we need to know and understand before constructing the idea. The primary figures involved are (1) plant species and planting composition, (2) planting layout, (3) vernacular structure, and (4) significant components in design (NLD, 2009). It was created to be a guide in designing the garden (Refer to Table 1).

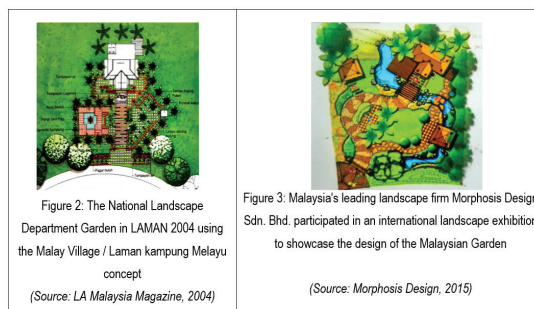
Table 1. The Basic Formation of the MGC

No.	Design Approach	Clarification formation
1	Plants species and planting composition	<p>a) Selection of plants. The choice of plants is based on three (3) main features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tropical plants - Plants usually grow in tropical climates. • Ethnobotanical plants - Plants related to the cultural use and way of life of the local people, such as herbs, medicines, customs, and traditions. • Types of plants that stimulate five (5) human senses – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Vision - Eyes (Color) ii) Odour - Nose (Scent) iii) Touch - Skin (Texture) iv) Taste - Mouth (Food) v) Hearing - Ear (Sound) <p>b) Planting composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured Planting (the method of planting is organic, not limited to a straightforward layout) • Planting Hierarchy (planting arrangement is in order, where shrubs and ground cover and support the main tree) • Bushes (plants that have a different shape and type, planted in clusters) • Different leaf textures (variety of leaf textures and structures)

2.	Planting layout	<p>a) The characteristics of tropical natural spaces can shape organic areas diversity and create various activities, e.g., open space, semi-enclosed, or enclosed.</p> <p>b) Natural landscape resources can create a unique feature of the space, e.g., water, rocks, flora, fauna, and soils.</p> <p>c) Topography and water body are parts of the visual and attractive compositions of a garden.</p>
3.	Vernacular structure	<p>a) Vernacular architecture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dominant local architectural elements can shape the garden's characteristics. • Implement an art on structures and the use of local materials in construction work. The finesse in the artwork adds value, privilege, and uniqueness to the MGC. <p>b) Traditional craftsmanship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing the MGC by using the elements of local traditional crafts such as saffron, tempayan (water vessels), buyung (earthenware water jar), screwpine leave mats, gasing (top spinning), moon kite, pua kumbu (the Iban hand-woven textile), songket (traditional material), batik (a method of dyeing fabric), seni manik (bead crafts art) and seni tekak (traditional embroidery). • The local natural plant motifs are compulsory. It will reflect the craftsmanship used in architecture and decoration. Indirectly, it creates an identity for the Malaysian Garden formation.
4.	Main component	<p>a) In general, the Malaysian Garden should use plants that have tropical and ethnobotanical characters.</p> <p>b) Besides, the other details to be considered in the design of the Malaysian Garden are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wakaf (traditional design shelter) • House compound (both sides) • Archway (main entrance) • Fences as boundaries (natural and human-made) • Water elements (natural and human-made)

(Source: NLD, 2009)

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show some of the initiatives by those responsible parties for developing and promoting the MGC. The attractive garden design highlighted by the appropriate elements and layout has made it too special. The garden design identity and an image representing Malaysia's indigenous people have been presented to the public.



METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach has been implemented in this study. The sampling was carried out using the method of "Purposeful Sampling". This sampling approach has been widely used in qualitative research to obtain reliable and appropriate information (Patton, 2002). Researchers have used site observations and interviews to obtain the information needed for this study. A total of 71 houses from 11 districts in Perak were sampled for this study. Out of the 71 houses that have been visited, there are nine unoccupied houses. The search for the 'Malay identity' is challenging because we need to get information about private traditional residential gardens. It is an exploratory study involving the researchers and the homeowners (Ani et al., 2012). This study uses the "Semi-Structured in-depth" technique in obtaining interview data. The researchers adapted this approach as "open-ended" questions focused more on the development of the issue. Referring to Meriam and Tisdell (2016), the respondents should answer the same queries based on their perception and experience. Each interview took between 30 to 45 minutes (it depends on the circumstances during the study). Observation data were made by video recording the site conditions and the types of garden elements found in each case study. Each selected sample complied to the following criteria:

- 1) Houses in traditional villages
- 2) The occupants of the house are Malays
- 3) Has hardscape and softscape elements in the home yard
- 4) Houses occupied or unoccupied during this study

As mentioned earlier, the researchers selected 71 houses for this study. However, the number is not uniform for each district. The selection of the house is 'on the spot' during the day of the visit. The houses visited were never known for their background, and this gives a 'sense of mystery' in this study.

This study's limitation is that the researchers did not have much time to be in a selected district and house (time constraint). Among the problems were: the time was too short; the study had to run on the weekend; and the observation process required the research assistant to carry out the task together.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Harun and Mat Zin (2018) identify cultural heritage assets as the ones widely available in rural areas through a unique culture, art, heritage, traditional knowledge, natural beauty, and ecological resources. Investigating the MGC elements in current scenarios is a continuing concern. The failure to obtain 'firm' guidelines in formulating the idea, its privileges and potential for development will make it worse. The issue of the MGC has been receiving considerable critical attention from the NLD over the past 20 years (Zakaria et al., 2020b). A vital aspect of the Perak Malay landscape element is softscape. Nowadays, the hardscape elements that have been found are no longer visible in good condition. One of the most significant current discussions in this study is the arrangement (layout) of the landscape elements (softscape and hardscape).

Table 2 shows that there are 21 hardscape elements found throughout the study conducted. The most common features are the 'flowerpot'. Almost all the houses sampled have this element. Other elements regularly found are 'water vessel,' 'chicken coop,' 'suspension,' 'resting hut,' and 'well.' Unfortunately, most of the hardscape elements found are not in a good condition due to lack of maintenance. As a matter of fact, all the houses visited, i.e. 594 units, had flowerpots as their harscape elements. '. Hence, it can be concluded that the 'flowerpot' is the most frequently found garden element (the main element of the hardscape) and this is proven by the large quantities (more than one unit) that every house has.

Table 2. The list of Hardscape Elements that are often Found during the Site Visit

No.	Hardscape	Nos
1	Flowerpot	584
2	Water vessel	49
3	Chicken Coop	40
4	Suspension (used to hang clothes)	31
5	Resting hut / pangkin	21
6	Well	21
7	Latrine (there is a reference using the term 'Jitra Toilet')	18
8	Outside bathroom	17
9	Bench	16

10	Outdoor store	16
11	Dumpsite	13
12	Guri (small earthenware)	11
13	Swing	9
14	Kolah / Water tank (water storage)	7
15	Planter box	4
16	Bridge (to cross the river)	3
17	Wakaf / Shelter	2
18	Barn	1
19	Birdhouse	1
20	Rice mortar and pestle	1
21	Grinding stone	1

(Source: Author, 2021)

Table 4 shows the plant species that were found by the researchers while conducting this study. The Malays in Malaysia are made up of various sub-ethnic groups include Malays themselves. During this study, the researchers took the opportunity to get information about the plants grown by the Malay sub-ethnic groups in Perak. Observational studies have found that all sub-ethnic groups grow 'cili padi' and 'kelapa.' It shows the importance of these two species in the Malay house compound landscape. An interview was conducted regarding the species and it was justified that hat the plant is a necessity in cooking. However, the use of 'kelapa' (coconuts?) is likely more widespread because it is a multipurpose plant (all parts of the plant can be utilised). Other plants found mostly are for cooking purposes and food. Plants that were just displaying aesthetic values are less planted by the Malays. They prefer to grow flowering plants for the purpose of yard beautification. The information stated is concerning sub-ethnic groups and does not represent individuals. However, this does not mean that all the houses visited (sub-ethnic houses) grow plants of the same species.

Table 3. The Malay Sub-ethnic Distribution

SE	Banjar	Jawa	Kerinci	Melayu	Mandailing	Rawa	Bugis	Minang
N	12	4	4	24	4	4	9	1

(Source: Author, 2021)

Notes: * SE: Sub-Ethnic / N: Nos

* The number is not uniform among the sub-ethnic groups

* Difficulty in obtaining respondents from the Minang ethnic group during the study

* A total of 62 occupied houses (9 were unoccupied)

Table 4. Plants in a Traditional Malay Ethnic House Compound in Perak

No.	Common Name	Botanical Name	The number of sub-ethnic involved
1	Cili Padi	Capsicum frutescens	8
2	Kelapa	Cocus nucifera	8
3	Kunyit	Curcuma domestica	5
4	Serai	Cymbopogon citratus	5
5	Inai	Lawsonia inermis	4
6	Mangga	Mangifera indica	3
7	Pisang	Musa spp.	3
8	Belimbing Buluh	Averrhoa bilimbi	2
9	Durian	Durio spp.	2
10	Rambutan	Nephelium lappaceum	2
11	Sireh	Piper betle	2
12	Ulam Raja	Cosmos caudatus	2
13	Betik	Carica papaya	1
14	Bunga Kantan	Etlingera elatior	1
15	Bunga Kertas	Bougainvillea spp.	1
16	Bunga Raya	Hibiscus rosa-sinensis	1
17	Gajus	Anacardium occidentale	1
18	Jagung	Zea mays	1
19	Kaduk	Piper sarmentosum	1
20	Keledek	Ipomoea batatas	1
21	Lengkuas	Alpinia galanga	1
22	Lemuni	Vitex negundo	1
23	Limau kasturi	Citrus microcarpa	1
24	Pandan	Pandanus amaryllifolius	1
25	Pinang	Areca catechu	1
26	Pucuk Ubi	Manihot esculenta	1
27	Putat	Barringtonia acutangula	1

(Source: Author, 2021)

Note: There are eight Malay ethnics in this study, namely, Melayu,; Banjar,Bugis, Jawa, Kerinci, Mendailing, Minang,,and Rawa

The researchers found some elements of hardscape and softscape of Perak Malay 'Kampung' that can be one of the MGC's images/identities. Table 5 shows the features that can be selected to be the design elements of the MGC.

Table 5. Elements that can Potentially become an Image and Identity to the MGC

No	Fundamentals of Formation	Potential Elements
1	Plant Species and planting composition	Plant species: Coconut (a crop of the humid tropics) Climate: Tropical (zone experiences hot and humid weather) Ethnological Plants: Herbs (kunyit, serai & inai) Senses: Taste (growing herbs as a source of food and economy.)
2	Planting layout	Layout: tropical and 'informal' features Species of plants: the selection of fruit plants such as 'Mangga' and 'Kelapa'.
3	Vernacular structure	Features of natural space: front space (public), left and right-side space (semi-private) and backspace (private). Natural landscape resources: mountain/hill/paddy field/beach and river as a background. Local architecture: types of traditional Malay houses such as Kutai and Limas. Local traditional crafts: pots, flowerpots & chicken coops.
4	Main component	Tropical plant species: Malays grow several plants that have specific functions and food products. House Compound: active activity (front yard), semi-active (left and right yard) & passive (back yard).

(Source: Author, 2021)

In the NLD's basic guidelines, there are eight criteria of MGC formation. It seems to focus only on developing vast areas such as public parks (NLD, 2009). The eight MGC criteria are [1] Genus Loci / Local Spirit; [2] Local Plants; [3] Architectural Structure and Local Elements; [4] Culture and Heritage; [5] High Intrinsic Values/refinement and originality; [6] Adaptability to Local Weather; [7] Security Elements; and [8] Management and Comfort. However, the observation study results found that the guidelines are not in line with what is on-site (sample: traditional house).

Several reasons are identified through the interviews conducted as to why these guidelines are not being followed today. Among the causes of this matter are:

- 1) All samples are made up of old traditional houses.
- 2) The style adopted in the guidelines is more to the character of contemporary

Malay culture.

- 3) It is not the practice of Perak Malays to show the beauty of the house exterior (prioritized on function and practicality).
- 4) The layout and design used was an 'informal' (not bound by strict guidelines but is still influenced by the philosophy and culture).
- 5) This guideline was only published in 2009 (its existence is considered new).

Potential of the MGC based on the Malay 'Kampung' Elements

Referring to the Tourism Malaysia report (a government agency under the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia), in 2010, the agency participated in a landscape design competition at the Chelsea Flower Show, London. The showcased design was named 'Malaysian Tropical Garden' which received a gold medal. In 2011, 'Tourism Malaysia' participated in the same landscape competition and presented the concept of 'Traditional Malay Village.' Fortunately, it once again showed the authenticity of Malaysian tourism (landscape?) and received a gold medal for the garden design. This indicates that the MGC is acknowledged and can be implemented internationally. There were very encouraging activities at the time of developing the idea. Furthermore, the landscape architecture industry needs an added value for survival.



Figure 4: Tourism Malaysia Garden, 2010
(Source: top-gardens.net)



Figure 5: Tourism Malaysia Garden, 2011
(Source: shootgardening.co.uk)

(Source: Author, 2021)

Table 6. The designers' View of the Malaysian Garden Concept.

View of the Malaysian Tropical Garden, 2010 Designer	View of the Tourism Malaysia Garden, 2011 Designer
'Inspired by lush rainforests and idyllic 'kampung' gardens, this is nevertheless a thoroughly modern garden, which interprets Malaysia's diverse cultures and landscapes through a 21st-century lens to create a garden as unusual, surprising, and dynamic as the country itself'. (Source: top-gardens.net)	'The design takes inspiration from the winding jungle streams and rich traditional architecture of the Malaysian Archipelago. Around the garden will be a brown limestone wall densely planted with curtains of trailing jungle vines, providing a dramatic contrast to the foreground of floating terraces of tropical plants, punctuated by streams of falling water'. (Source: shootgardening.co.uk)

(Source: Author, 2021)

The two (2) examples given above have shown that the garden elements in the 'kampung' of the Malay community can be an exciting concept which can possibly be developed globally. Softscape features are found to have the most potential to be produced internationally. The softscape elements in Malaysia, i.e. the 'tropical plants', have a strong character, ' As for the hardscape elements, we can see the potential from the use of materials and craftsmanship. A study conducted by Edytia et al. (2019) show that a person is mainly influenced by the stimuli obtained from sight which can reflect and comply with his environment. However, it is necessary to produce the layout innovation/creativity according to the suitability of a site. Without the enforcement of the responsible parties involved, obtaining sufficient resources or funds does not guarantee that we can implement MGC guidelines effectively (Zakaria et al., 2020a). The designer's capability and creativity are also required to adapt the MGC to an attractive garden concept successfully.

CONCLUSION

The interpretation of the traditional 'kampung' cultural landscape requires understanding of the fundamental beliefs, ideology, and the dynamic symbolism behind the landscape forms. The term 'kampung' does not need a verbal expression. It immediately demonstrates how the 'Malays' live culturally on land. It cannot be perfectly defined as a ground on which the

natural elements are associated with the settlement characteristics. Rather, the rural Malays' lives and their societies' contexts are represented. It has substantially given a clear existential platform, which shows strong physical success, a high appreciation of nature in religious and rural social zeal. In Malay daily activities, every aspect of the landscape inside 'kampung' shows specific cultural characteristics that define Muslim attitudes towards life and society.

The Malays are less concerned with the issues of cleanliness and maintenance. Home compounds are in poor condition, which is the cause of hardscape elements not being well cared for by occupants. If this situation persists, the Malay Garden concept seems less appealing and will not be able to compete with other garden concepts. The elements of the 'kampung' landscape in Perak have been found insufficient to reach the level that can be an identity to the country. We need to be clear with this even though it is quite difficult to express it to the public. The identity and image of the traditional landscape in Perak are currently less prominent in terms of design and arrangements of the garden features. Various factors for this have been discussed earlier. Some of the most significant ones are the residents' attitudes that are less focused on landscape design aspects. Although we know that the traditional landscape layout of a Malay's 'kampung' house is 'informal' (does not require a standardization approach), it is not much highlighted in the houses that have been sampled in this study. After all, the researchers found that the NLD guidelines are basically general and do not focus on the landscape of the house compound. If observed clearly, these guidelines are more likely to impact the development of public parks significantly.

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