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REBUILDING PLACE WITH THE SIAMESE CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL VALUES: WAT MACHIMMARAM, KELANTAN

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Abstract

Cultural identity of each religion plays an important role in its places of worship. The Siamese culture can be seen strongly affecting its place of worship called 'wat'. However, this worship place can be identified only on the northern part of the Peninsular Malaysia: Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis thus limited reference sources. This research aims to examine the Siamese cultural identity that contributes to the rebuilding of place of Wat Machimmaram associated with Buddhism. Siamese Buddhist are very faithful towards wat hence older generations will advise the younger generations to conserve the wat architecture. Architecture of wat was design in order to facilitate users (Buddhist). Hence, the space planning and the buildings are built to the comprehensive and maximum used. Cultural identity of Siamese such as their religious ceremonies, celebration or festival will be held in wat area. Siamese need wat as a centre for them to conduct religious activities along a year. Therefore, knowledge of Siamese cultural identity with their strong belief, able to rebuild the wat. Research method used is qualitative in nature with phenomenology method as the main process. Combination of methods conducting interviews with Siamese people, reviewing to documents of wat, and observing the wat area and buildings in wat. Culture is a key role in influencing architectural values. Wat is an iconic that reflected Siamese Buddhist culture and their identity. The architecture and design of buildings in wat clearly shows the exquisite, and meticulous of Siamese culture including their beliefs, faithful and religious towards Buddhism.

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Keywords: Siamese, culture, Buddhism, Wat, rebuilding place.



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1. Introduction

The Malaysian Siamese ethnic history is related to the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. Before 1909, northern states of Malaya such as Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis were under the auspices of the Siamese kingdom (currently known as Thailand) and these states were changed to British hand after Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 (Jerryson, 2017). This treaty causes these four states to be separated from the Siamese kingdom (Chandran, 1971). However, because these people lived under Siamese kingdom for a long period of time, they have the effect of a lasting Siamese cultural influence (Ismail, 2013).

Wat Machimmaram is a Buddhist monastery located at Kampung Jubakar Darat, Tumpat, Kelantan, Malaysia. This wat is well known with a huge Sitting Buddha (Figure 1) (Pramuan, 2010). Moreover, one of the buildings in this wat, known as 'ubosot' (Figure 2) was built 400 years ago (Pramuan, 2010). Thus, the attractions of Wat Machimmaram are the Large Sitting Buddha and also the ancient 'ubosot' building. According to Smith (2003), the largest sitting Buddha in Southeast Asia was located at Wat Machimmaram, in Kelantan, an Islamic state in Malaysia.



Figure 01. Phra Phut Barami Tham Camratlork [พระพุทธรูปบารมีธรรมเจ้ารัสโลก] (Sitting Buddha), Wat Machimmaram



Figure 02. Ubosot of Wat Machimmaram before renovation
Source: Khoruamdetch (2013)

1.1. Siamese culture

1.1.1. Ordination to become a monk/novice in Siamese tradition

As a Siamese man, ordination to become a monk is one of the important cultural traditions in Buddhist Thai culture. In Thailand, ordination has been a traditional practice since ancient period. A Buddhist may enter monastic order in order to experience peaceful existence. After some period of time, he can resume an ordinary existence if he feels disinclined to continue in the monkhood (Arunsutalangarn, 2018). According to Keyes 1986, Thais believed that children are in debt to their parents who raised them, so ordination is a way as a son to 'pay gratitude' to their parents (Yavaprabhas, 2018).

Ordination period is a time for monk to learn the Dhamma discipline and trained themselves to be tolerance towards negative elements. They have to practice themselves in order to control their physical, verbal and mind to be in good order. Buddhists believe that the monk and his family relatives especially his parents will get big merit once they hold this ordination ceremony. In terms of religion, ordination as a monk or novice, they are religious successors who responsible to spread the religion knowledge in order to prove that humans can actually live according to the teachings of Buddhism (Jitritherm, Uddhikaro, & Netnimit, 2019).

1.1.2. Thai greeting or 'Wai' is Siamese identity

For Thai people, 'Wai' (Figure 3) is a utilitarian function used for greetings, expressing thanks or apologies. The 'Wai' also shows national identity function, status marking function and also religious function (Powell, Amsbary, & Hickson, 2014).



Figure 03. Buddhist are doing 'Wai' to the monk while praying

1.1.3. Thai culture

Thais believe that Buddhism was shaped from the way of life which can lead to happiness. They are self-reliant but friendly between themselves and to others (Runglertkengkrai & Engkaninan, 1987).

1.2. Wat is the reflection of Siamese Buddhist culture

Thai architecture clearly reflected their cultural identity and their lifestyle. House, monastery (wat) and government buildings are the examples of outstanding Thai architecture (Jurinlakh, 2014). Buddhist monastery or known as 'wat' is important to Buddhism because wat is the educational centre, welfare institution, public club for relaxation, recreation centre with various festive fair, meeting place and cultural centre where cultural artefacts have been preserved (Arunsutalangkarn, 2018).

Wat consists of important buildings such as 'Phra Ubosot', 'Phra Wihan', 'Phra Chedi'. The monks and novices are staying in a building called 'Kuti' (Jinnasaro, 2013). As mentioned previously, wat is considered as a religious place and a place of charity. It is also the centre to cultivate morality mind. Moreover, wat is also a place where the religious activities are conducted, such as observing the precepts, listening to Buddha's teaching, and praying. These are the expression of various customs and traditions which is related to the Buddhism (Punyo & Opasso, 2015).

Originally, wat was built in order to facilitate the monks in order to develop themselves according to the principles and discipline of Dhamma. Therefore, to build a wat, the selected area must have a peaceful physical environment, conducive to Dhamma practice in order to learn Buddhism doctrine and leads to self-improvement in Dharma knowledge (Punyo & Opasso, 2015). From past to present, wat is the centre for Thai society, and currently, wat develops progressively in tourism industry known as religion tourism especially for ancient monastery (Haareansong, 2018).

2. Problem Statement

The Malaysian Siamese community still not widely known among Malaysians because it is small ethnic in Malaysia. The problem statement of this research is the lack of understanding about the relations between Siamese community culture and the rebuilding place regarding Siamese culture according to the abbot of Wat Machimmaram. The Malaysian Siamese culture is not documented in any valid document for reference purpose according to the local villagers at Kampung Jubakar Darat. Therefore, it causes the insufficient about the knowledge of Siamese culture in order to rebuild a place.

3. Research Questions

This research is focusing on rebuilding place of wat architecture with Siamese culture. Based on that, the research questions are:

- How does the Siamese culture contribute to the rebuilding of wat?
- What are the identity of Siamese cultural that related to architectural of wat?
- Why does the Siamese culture affect the rebuilding place?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine the Siamese culture that contributes to rebuilding place of wat. Buddhist Siamese are the people who are using the facilities in wat. Therefore, their cultural traditions should be emphasised in order to rebuilding place of wat. This research purposely to analyse the Siamese tradition and identity that affect the architectural value of a wat. This tradition includes the ritual,

celebration and beliefs. The charm of Siamese cultural identity in architectural context needs to be explored further. The wat studied is influenced by the Buddhist Siamese architectural style.

5. Research Methods

The methodology used in this research is qualitative in nature with phenomenology method as the main process. A combination of methods include conducting interviews, refers to documents and observing the wat area. Interviews with the Siamese ethnic in Tumpat area were also conducted. The respondents of this research are the Siamese at Kampung Jubakar Darat who lives around the Wat Machimmaram. This method aims to obtain information about their identity, traditions, beliefs, as well as the architectural documentation. Moreover, this will lead to the cultural and lifestyle learning through conversation.

This method refers to documents which is purposely selected to explore the basic knowledge about wat and Thai culture. It can help the researcher to learn the essential of Thai culture that can contribute to the understanding of Malaysian Siamese culture. The documents used in this research are books, magazines, and also the electronic version. This is to obtain a deeper information regarding the Thai culture, not only Siamese culture in Tumpat area. Architectural observation on the wat and its surrounding was also conducted to gain deeper understanding about the wat structure and each building's identity. A wat consists of various buildings with different functions for a different purpose. Every tradition that is related to Siamese culture will be held at this wat. Hence, wat was built in various architectural styles and designs.

6. Findings

6.1. Malaysian Siamese community

Malaysian Siamese is the minor community in Malaysia. Their culture is similar with the Thailand culture because in the past, Malaysian Siamese were also under the Siam Kingdom. However, the dissimilarity of Malaysian Siamese culture is slowly getting obvious from the original Thai culture because it is influenced by the Malay culture. The Malaysian Siamese community is surrounded by the Malay Muslim community. Their lifestyle changed accordingly to the surroundings in order to adapt to other cultures. However, every Siamese and Thai traditions are based on Buddhism. They still have the same beliefs, believing in morality in living their daily life. They are practicing their traditional tradition based on the traditional culture and religion. Siamese culture is the combination of their beliefs, traditions, ideology, arts, and lifestyle.

6.2. The distinctive tradition of Siamese culture

Malaysian Siamese are rich with their cultural identity. One of the inherited traditions based on Siamese cultural is to undergo the ordination ceremony. Once a lifetime, a man aged 20 years old or more, is encouraged to ordinate as a monk. Buddhist Siamese believe in merit making, thus they believe that ordination is a contribute to merit making. The aims for ordination to become a monk is to practice

himself to keep the mind calm. In line with this reason, a monk is able to study the religious knowledge determinedly. Consequently, the Siamese always gives a priority to this ceremony.

Basically, the ordination ritual will be held in 'Ubosot' building. On that day, the man who is going to ordinate, together with his family and guests will march around the 'Ubosot' before entering the building. This is one of the inherited Buddhist Siamese culture traditions. Afterwards, during the ordination period, the monk is responsible to study Dhammain order to train himself to become a discipline and passive human. Ordination to become a monk is only one of various Siamese cultural traditions. Other than that, during Wesak day, Buddhist will march around the 'Ubosot' building as a part of religious ceremony called 'vian thian' (refer to Figure 4). They will light up a candle with three joss sticks and march around the 'Ubosot' building for three continuous rounds.



Figure 04. 'Vian thian' ceremony on Wesak Day, Wat Prachumthat Chanaram, Tumpat
Source: Personal documentation (2019)

Another famous Siamese tradition is the Loy Krathong, which is held annually. On that day, Siamese Buddhist will be praying at the wat (Figure 5) before going to the nearest river or lake to float their 'krathong' (Figure 6).



Figure 05. Praying ceremony on Loy Krathong day, Wat Nai, Penang
Source: Personal documentation (2018)



Figure 06. Loy Krathong or Floating *Krathong* to the river, Wat Nai, Penang
Source: Personal documentation (2018)

These Siamese traditions show the relationship between the wat and the Siamese culture. This tradition clearly shows their beliefs towards the Buddha religion, their traditions society who are emphasising to the ceremony, and the arts of each ritual.

6.3. Buddhist monastery or wat

Buddhist monastery or known as 'wat' is the centre for Buddhist Siamese. The architecture of *wat* clearly described the Siamese culture, identity, and beliefs. The architecture detailing on buildings in wat such as 'Ubosot' (Figure 7), and 'hor rakhang' or belfry (Figure 8) are reflecting the Thai culture and art. The details on the roof, window, door, and pole are also based on the Thai arts. The mural on the building portrayed the traditional environment of Thai society in the past. Some of the murals are depicting the history of Buddha. Hence, the people who are visiting these buildings are able to imagine the combination of Thai arts and the Thai architecture.



Figure 07. Ubosot building at Wat Machimmaram
Source: Personal documentation (2018)



Figure 08. Hor Rakhang or Thai belfry at WatMachimmaram
Source: Personal documentation (2018)

There were numbers of religious ceremonies conducted at the studied wat, such as Songkran day (Thai New Year), Wesak day, Buddha day, ordination ceremony, funeral and many others. In general, wat was built in order to accommodate various annual religious and cultural activities. It is also an iconic figure of Buddhism and as centre for Buddhist and monks. The architecture of Wat Machimmaram indirectly shows the Siamese cultural with their beliefs. The buildings in the wat were built accordingly to the needs of the users, which is the Siamese Buddhist and monks. The Buddha statue altar are placed at the highest position and the seat for the monks must be higher than the commoners. Hence, it shows that the architecture and its space planning always related to the Siamese culture in order to create a harmonious design.

7. Conclusion

A culture plays an important role for rebuilding space of any religious place which must include the community's beliefs, traditions, as well as the lifestyle. Rebuilding place with Siamese cultural and architecture values require the understanding of Siamese daily lifestyle. Their lifestyle includes beliefs, traditions, and customs. Buddhist wat is a place which was purposely built as a place for rituals, gathering, and to celebrate any Siamese cultural festival. Thus, Siamese culture is significantly affecting the overall design of the wat. This is because their daily lives are always affiliated to the wat. Moreover, the structure of the wat clearly described the architectural and cultural values of Siamese ethnics. Therefore, the understanding of Siamese culture is important in order to rebuilding space of a wat. Rebuilding a place has to be suitable with the surrounding culture, otherwise it could be problematic in the future.

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