"And behold, it is in the Essence of the Book, with Us; sublime indeed, wise."
The Qur'an (Chapter 43, Verse 4)

ART OF NUSANTARA
THE SOUTHEAST FRONTIER OF ISLAM
Dzul Haimi Bin Md Zain

Through trade activity, Islam was spread far and wide throughout the region, and subsequently changed not only the religion and beliefs of different communities, but also developed their thought, culture and the arts. This propagation undoubtedly began with the Holy Qur'an. This was introduced directly by Muslim missionaries from the Middle East, India and China, who arrived in Southeast Asia during the 13th century. Beginning with the proclamation of the Shahada ("There is no god but Allah and the Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger"), Muslims display their appreciation of Islam in their daily lives. This can be seen not only in their way of life, but also in the totality of their world view, as is recorded in a pepatih adat Melayu (traditional Malay saying):

"Tradition joined by law
Law joined by Kitab'Allah"

The proclamation of the Shahada encompasses all. Living one’s life by the rules means attaining a purity based on Islamic law, and the ordering of culture is also based on the Qur'an. Beauty can be expressed in the written word. It can also be appreciated through calligraphy, aural art and visual art. What is produced within this region is an intrinsic part of the civilisation of the Islamic world. Evidence of the regional manifestation of this glory can be found in its artistic heritage, as art is the essence of every civilisation.

"Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,
created Man of a blood-clot.
Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous,
who taught by the Pen,
taught Man that he knew not."
The Qur'an (Chapter 96, Verses 1-5)

The heritage of language in its literary form remains evident, although it is known that most examples have been lost, due to climatic conditions and lack of care. The materials used for writing were the surfaces of paper and wood, neither of which is very durable. Inscriptions on stone are more valuable for examining the past. Scholars are striving to trace, research and record any available
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Arabic calligraphy is accorded the highest regard in Islam because it heralds wa'ahy, or the Word of God, in the form of the Qur'an as well as in writing found on gravestones, architecture, metalwork and textiles. Writing is the medium of communication in matters concerning religion, administrative rule, business and law. In Islamic art, calligraphy is the highest possible form of expression. It forms the basis of a visual art that is built on the arrangement of artistic elements and the principles of design.

The development of Islam within this region was not exempt from the proliferation of thought and culture, whether direct or otherwise, from Muslims who originated in the Middle East, India and China. Their influence can be detected in music, literature and visual art. Accounts by Safavid and Mughal authorities during the 16th to the 18th century state that in order to have the ability to create beautiful writing, it is necessary to undergo four levels of theory and practice. The first stage is understanding the history of renowned calligraphers and their contribution to the art of calligraphy. The second stage is recognising the tools of the calligrapher and learning the best writing techniques, as exemplified by master calligraphers. This includes the ability to prepare ink and pen properly. The third stage is acquiring a thorough knowledge of Arabic calligraphy. This requires a level of accomplishment high enough that it would be difcult to differentiate between the student and the teacher. The final stage allows for the creation of a new style of writing.

The basis of creativity
Islam gave creative empowerment to Muslim artists. The understanding and appreciation of the Qur'an deliberatedly formed the thought and philosophy of the Islamic arts within the region. Local culture underwent a process of Islamisation that is highly visible in Southeast Asian art. Human and animal forms, which are the usual source of inspiration, underwent the creative process of reinvention. The transformation of plant and animal forms led to the creation of designs that were more acceptable to the Muslim community at large. The discouragement of figurative representation resulted in a high level of artistic creativity. Restrictions still leave ample room for creative freedom and individuality. Limitations are not obstacles, but are guidelines which aspire to an ideal in accordance with Islamic teachings and the Islamic world-view.

And He will teach him the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel
The Qur'an (Chapter 3, Verse 48)

This realisation permits artists to produce creative work in a more abstract arrangement. The creation and understanding of a visual language allows them to choose any element from God's universe in order to create art. Today, few viewers are able to comprehend the hidden meaning within these art
forms, much less recognise the motifs employed. The glory of Islam in Southeast Asia and the heritage of its visual language have developed without adequate appreciation.

Artistic activity began with the Holy Qur'an and the realisation that the universe created by God is evidence of His presence. Referring to the beauty of the universe created by God is to refer to the beauty of God. Muslim artists realise that no one can surpass the greatness of Allah. They realise their humble position in reverence to God and their limitations in creating art. Therefore, the process of creativity begins with the process of imitating nature. Ultimately, the beauty of their work can never be compared with the beauty of God's universe of creation. Their art is modelled after nature.

The limitation of creating artwork that is dictated either by ability or religious guidelines provides room for Muslim artists to 'denaturalise' nature in their creations. The process of imitating nature takes the artist to the second level, which is stylising their subject. It is, of course, far from a true representation of the natural world. Typical examples of the depiction of motifs derived from nature are found in textiles such as batik and songket, which are entirely stylised in their depictions. The motifs on these textiles show the transformation of representations of nature that have occurred. The depiction of the bamboo shoot, which is seen in numerous artefacts within the region, is a highly stylised portrayal of nature. The same approach can be found in objects from many parts of the Islamic world. In this way, Muslim artists are not in a position to contest God's creation. Depictions such as these help avoid situations where idolatry might occur, thereby rejecting the essential oneness of God.

![Image](image_url)

*The pusuk rhang appears in a wide variety of media*

Stylised motifs develop into an abstraction of the portrayal of nature. Natural motifs are analysed until the essence of their form is distilled, embodied in geometric lines. Conceptually, the proclamation of the characteristics of the oneness of God is widely recognised; Islamic patterns are produced in a profusion of Islamic art forms. These patterns are repetitive because Islamic art makes reference to the knowledge and the infinite greatness of Allah.
recognise the motifs employed. The glory of Islam in Southeast Asia and the
language have developed without adequate appreciation.

Illuminated manuscripts

Qur’ans from Islamic lands outside Southeast Asia tend to be lavishly illuminated. As the Qur’an is
the holiest book of Islam, it is likely that copies brought by Muslim missionaries became examples
which influenced the production of local Qur’ans. The decoration of Southeast Asian Qur’ans made
less plentiful use of gold than those from the Arab world, Persia, India and China. Local tastes are
reflected in the Qur’anic decoration of this region. It is apparent that the Southeast Asian emphasis
is on moderation and simplicity.

At times, regional Qur’ans bear a resemblance to the style of Chinese decoration, the main
differences being the scrolling cloud motif and the use of typically Chinese colours, uncommon to
Southeast Asian Qur’ans. In Southeast Asia, motifs from nature and abstract forms are used
extensively in Qur’an decoration. Upon close examination, these motifs and types of decoration have
much in common with other Islamic manuscripts, although most likely they have differing creative
frameworks. There is generally a common factor in the arrangement of the decoration of a Qur’an.
Only three important sections are given decoration – the beginning, the middle and the end. The
frontispiece (muqarnas) and finispiece are not found in decorated manuscripts of Southeast Asia.
Qur’anic verses remain unchanged and are protected by the use of various Nashk scripts that are
easy to read. The Sini script does not play a prime role in influencing the Qur’anic writing of
Southeast Asia. Floral motifs and abstract forms that do not go against the teachings of Islam are
commonly employed.

The pusuk rebung appears in a wide variety of media

Motifs develop into an abstraction of the portrayal of nature. Natural motifs are

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Scrolling-cloud motifs suggest the influence of China

Although countless Qur’ans were made within the region, most of them bear no date.
Establishing the age of these manuscripts requires careful examination. A dated and illuminated
Qur’an from Terengganu belonging to Sultan Zainal Abidin is among the earliest examples in
Southeast Asia. This beautiful Qur’an, copied in 1817 AD / 1288 AH, uses gold leaf, as well as yellow,
red and blue pigments. This decoration can be seen on the head margin, the fore-edge margin and the tail margin. Qur’anic text is written in the middle of the recto and verso folios. Both the opening bi-folios are framed and the frames connect the right and the left pages. The lack of frames on the kunas indicates Middle Eastern influence.

On the other hand, decorated Qur’ans from Aceh display a distinct variation. It can be said that the use of colours and decoration belongs to a common source, that is the arts of the Malay Archipelago. The motifs of scrolling tendrils used are quite similar to the ones found in the arts of the Malay Peninsula, although they have been further simplified. Red, blue and yellow are colours that are most commonly used in Qur’ans produced in the region. The selection inclines towards warm tones, with the exception of cold colours such as blue. Possibly, limitations in the use of natural pigments prevented the use of colours derived from precious stones such as lapis lazuli. Those used are in the same group as is found on textiles, particularly batik.

Other than the Holy Qur’an, the art of decorated manuscripts can also be seen in various religious, literary and historical books. For example, in the Hikayat Hang Tuah belonging to Almarhum Tengku Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Tengku Muhammad (Tengku Seri Utama Raja), a member of the Kelantan royal family, and in the Kitab Maulud Syarif, we find that the designs within these manuscripts bear a close resemblance to the art of the Qur’an. Despite this, they cannot compare to the exquisite beauty of Qur’anic decoration. Undeniably, less impressive Qur’an decorations were also produced. These were probably made to satisfy the demand of those who were unable to afford the expense of commissioning a renowned moushalib to decorate their works. This situation led to the production of imitation decorated manuscripts, copied from original volumes or reproductions of exquisite examples, such as a manuscript found in a mosque in the islands of Riau in southern Singapore, or many decorated Qur’ans from Aceh, Patani and Sulawesi.

Architecture

From decorated Qur’ans, we move on to mosque architecture. Few examples of traditional wooden architecture have survived the climatic conditions of the region. During the 15th century, Islam spread rapidly in Java. The Majapahit empire was usurped by an Islamic government under the reign of the first Islamic ruler of Demak, Panembahan Jimbun, better known as Raden Patah, from Palembang. The illustrious Great Mosque of Demak was built in northern Java around 1479. In the year 1546, the mosque was expanded by Sultan Trenggana. The Great Mosque of Demak has a distinctive architectural style in its three-tiered roof or atap tengan, and is also surrounded by a garden marking the tombs of the Demak sultanate. Structurally, each level of roofing is constructed out of its own set of pillars.

The architectural style of the Demak mosque has several similarities to the architecture of mosques in the Malay Peninsula. In Kelaotan, the Kampung Laut mosque, which is said to have been
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ural style of the Demak mosque has several similarities to the architecture of ay Peninsula. In Kelantan, the Kampung Laut mosque, which is said to have been built about 250 years ago, also bears a striking resemblance to the Great Mosque of Demak. The Malaysian mosque employs the three-tiered atap bettengge style, but upon closer examination reveals slight variances. The Kampung Laut Mosque has roof of varying sizes. The roofs of this mosque are supported by a different configuration of pillars. The Great Mosque of Demak is also larger than the Kampung Laut Mosque.

A mosque with a combination of styles on the west coast of Sumatra

A similar mosque design can be seen in the Terengkera Mosque of Tanjung Keling, Melaka, which was built in 1728. Although the mosque has undergone restoration and expansion, its rectangular plan remains the same and it also has a perched roof. The Kampung Kapur Mosque, which was built in 1748, also has a similar design to those previously mentioned. Originally made of wood, it was replaced with brick in 1972 and underwent expansion in 1908. The mosque has a minaret in its western corner, separated from the mosque's main structure. This minaret, like the minarets of other mosques in Melaka (such as the Jamek Mosque of Ujung Pasir, Tanjung Keling Mosque, Bukit Darat Mosque, Bukit Cina Mosque, Kampung Gelam Mosque and Tengga Batu Mosque) has its own unique style when compared to those of other mosques with perched roofs. Elements of both Chinese and Indian heritage are obvious in this brick minaret.

The architects’ inclination to build mosques with numerous domes and minarets can also be seen in the Abu Bakar Mosque of Johor, the Jamek Mosque in Kuala Lumpur, the Alaudin Mosque in Kuala Langat, and the Sultan Sulaiman Mosque in Kelang. In Indonesia, examples of mosques which generally share a similar style are the Baiturrachman Mosque, Banda Aceh, and the Jamik Malang Mosque in East Java.
Textiles

The world's greatest civilisations, including the Middle East, India and China, have played a role in the development of Islamic textiles of Southeast Asia. Their patterns, colours and production techniques have influenced textile makers considerably. Textiles were pivotal to the governmental system of the Malay world. They are often described in Malay manuscripts, where rewards from the ruler to his loyal subjects were usually in the form of textiles. They were also instrumental as reciprocal tributes to foreign dignitaries and governments. These gifts were always in the form of highly valued textiles, such as songket and limar. In addition, patronage of the production of these textiles was often by the court.

Islamic teachings have an important role to play in regional textile art. Other than abstracted motifs from nature, calligraphic letters in the form of Qur'anic verses and prayers are also incorporated into textile designs. The colour scheme of these cloths is very similar to that of manuscript decoration, with frequent use of yellow, red, green, blue, black and white. These colours also have specific meanings and are symbolic in Malay civilisation. Yellow, for example, symbolises power, sovereignty and aristocracy.

In addition, the ways in which textiles were worn reflected the wearer's personality, regional culture, and the values of Islam. To be clothed properly is to be courteous and well mannered, rooted in tradition and politeness. The production of all forms of textiles can be seen in two stages: beautiful when worn, and beautiful in itself. When turned into clothing, they must be displayed with a high level of courtesy and good manners to uphold the concept of ultimate beauty. The beautiful songket should be the embodiment of all the goodness and inner beauty of the wearer. As a result, the wearer is always kept safe in this world and in the next.

A profusion of batiks has been produced in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula. There are several similarities and differences in the design structure of both Peninsular Malay and Indonesian batiks. Generally, a batik sarong has visual divisions such as the ‘badan’ (body), ‘kepala’ (head), ‘aqiq’ (vertical band), ‘tali air’ (narrow vertical band), ‘tepi’ (edge); and ‘gigi’ (teeth). Vegetal and animal motifs are arranged within this visual structure according to local tastes. Most motifs have undergone the process of stylisation countless times, leading to complete abstraction. Depictions of animals or insects are abstracted into vegetal-like forms such as flowers, but never a true depiction of a flower taken from nature. Hidden in the visual structure and use of motifs, it can be said that the images on a batik sarong are in actuality a unique landscape painting, a valid entity with its own visual vocabulary.

There are various types of textiles, other than the batik sarong, which are worn extensively in Muslim communities throughout Southeast Asia. Just as batik is widely used, songket is exclusive and worn only for ceremonial purposes. The motifs are inspired from nature but have been abstracted. Perhaps the method of production limits the creative process to the level of geometry. However, if seen from another angle, referring to the process of creativity and philosophy of Islamic art,
eastern civilizations, including the Middle East, India and China, have played a role in the development of Islamic textiles of Southeast Asia. Their patterns, colours and production techniques have influenced textile makers considerably. Textiles were pivotal to the governmental and religious world. They are often described in Malay manuscripts, where rewards from the subjects were usually in the form of textiles. They were also instrumental as a means of foreign dignitaries and governments. These gifts were always in the form of gifts, such as songket and linen. In addition, patronage of the production of these by these fine textiles have an important role to play in regional textile art. Other than abstracted calligraphic letters in the form of Qur'anic verses and prayers are also used in textile designs. The colour scheme of these cloths is very similar to that of the royal house, with frequent use of yellow, red, green, blue, black and white. These colours have meanings and are symbolic in Malay civilisation. Yellow, for example, symbolises wealth and aristocracy.

The ways in which textiles were worn reflected the wearer’s personality, regional loyalties, and the reputation of the individual within the community. The production of all forms of textiles can be seen in two stages: beautiful and lavish. When turned into clothing, they must be displayed with high degree of skill, to elevate the concept of ultimate beauty.

The beautiful songket odiment of all the goodness and inner beauty of the wearer. As a result, the wearer in this world and in the next.

Batik sarongs have been produced in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula. There are differences in the design structure of both Peninsular Malay and Indonesian batik sarongs. There are visual divisions such as the "badan" (body), "kepala" (head), "api" (narrow vertical band); "epi" (edge); and "gigi" (teeth). Vegetal and animal motifs in this visual structure according to local tastes. Most motifs have undergone a process of abstraction. Depictions of animals or insects in vegetal-like forms such as flowers, but never a true depiction of a flower taken from the visual structure and use of motifs, it can be said that the images on a fabric are actually unique landscapes. This is a valid entity with its own visual vocabulary. Various types of textiles, other than the batik sarong, which are worn extensively in the region. Just as batik is widely used, songket is exclusive and enominal purposes. The motifs are inspired from nature but have been abstracted. Production limits the creative process to the level of geometry. However, if angle, referring to the process of creativity and philosophy of Islamic art,

abstraction is the highest level of the hierarchy. References to nature are hidden or disguised, and are not seen. Therefore, its use is limited and its high value ensures it can only be worn by those who are able to afford it.

Woodwork

The beauty of Malay woodwork can be seen in architecture, boats, the hills of weapons, jewellery boxes, domestic implements such as coconut graters and ladles, as well as farming and hunting tools. The woodcarving tradition of Southeast Asia is refined and uses various techniques to create two and three-dimensional forms depending on its use. The carver often remains anonymous, just as the craftsmen of other Islamic arts do.

In mosque architecture, the most commonly encountered component in wood is the mimbar. Early mosques were mostly of modest size, and therefore their mimbars were also small, with just one or two steps. These may be heavily carved and decorated with vegetal motifs. At the opposite end of the size spectrum are kris hilts – among the most interesting examples of carving. Wood hilts are usually carved in the form of stylised and abstracted animal and human forms. Forms inspired by animals are composed and combined with motifs from nature. The grace of plant motifs is as apparent in woodwork as it is in metalwork and manuscript decoration, bringing a natural harmony to works from the region. This marks the quintessential contribution of Southeast Asia to the entire field of Islamic art.
ARCHITECTURE
TRANSFORMATION OF FORM AND CULTURE
Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi

The values of the sunnah have been assimilated and transformed by Southeast Asian cultures into their own unique versions of traditions and architecture. Unlike art forms such as paintings and sculptures, architecture is both a public and an elitist art form that reveals the physical pages of a culture's history. With an understanding of the architectural elements and languages of a country, it is possible to describe the living patterns, aspirations and beliefs of a people.

It is important to examine some of the controversies surrounding the term 'Islamic architecture'. Instead of giving a packaged idea of the subject, the values of the sunnah can be explained in relation to three typologies of built forms: the mosque, the house/palace and unken and the cemetery. These three aspects of architecture outline the manifestation of Muslim living patterns everywhere. Before proceeding to the buildings of Southeast Asia, a short discourse on the ideas of architecture, Islam and 'Islamic Architecture' must be dealt with first.

Explaining the nature and idea of Islamic architecture is anything but easy. The first problem on the list is the term 'architecture' itself. There are three kinds of architecture. The first of these can be called 'natural traditional architecture'. This term refers to all buildings constructed by the users for no purpose other than to suit their living patterns. These are largely constructed by the owners themselves or by craftsmen who invariably are a part of the same culture and social system. The second type is the 'manufactured architecture' - a building, usually large and monumental, which is designed by an architect and specifically commissioned by a patron to evoke a social message of domination. These kinds of buildings are designed outside of their utilitarian purposes to project a strong public influence by architects. The third kind is 'forced architecture', in which the building dwellers or users have little choice but to live in housing projects or offices that are poorly designed en masse by architects.

At the same time, there appear to be three kinds of Islam practiced presently. It is important to understand which type one is referring to in order not to confuse the contradictory architecture that is presented in a society. The first kind of Islam is that which is practised as a tradition. In many vernacular villages, or even modern ones, Islam exists as part of the rich cultural system to the point that what is an ethnic and a religious practice seems to be the same. The architecture is usually distinct from any other 'secular' establishment as traditional Islam of this kind exists side by side in different identities.

The second kind of Islam is that which is considered a symbolic presence. It is easy to
recognise this kind of architecture as the buildings are usually ostentatious, grand and singularly monumental. The third kind of Islam is as an ideology in which the values of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are transformed in the modern living fabric of social and political lives of the people. The architecture of this type of Islam may be indistinguishable from any other local context; differences can only be discerned in the plans and the observance of daily usage.

An inspiration to Frank Lloyd Wright – architecture in harmony with nature

‘Islamic architecture’

In any discourse on Islamic architecture, there is the question of the difference between the idea of Islamic architecture and architecture by Muslims. Sometimes it seems easier to talk about the architecture of Muslim societies than it is of ‘Islamic architecture’. For example, does the separation of spaces for men and women in the Malay house constitute an idea of Muslim/Islamic architecture? On the one hand, one might say yes; but on the other, the separation was already in existence long before the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia. In many traditional societies, whether Islamic or not, a differentiation between spaces for men and women is normal. Then there is the other problem of whether a building such as a bank or an office structure could be considered ‘Islamic’. Since the office ritual is a universal modern function, how can a building housing such an activity be considered ‘Islamic’? Can we truly say that since an office building in Malaysia has many pointed arches, calligraphic tiles and large domes it is ‘Islamic architecture’?

Would a three-tiered pyramidal timber-roofed mosque be less Islamic than its domed and masonry arched counterpart? It is no surprise that architects and arbiters of taste would settle on the universalistic notion of Islamic architecture of onion domes, multi-soil arches and exotic calligraphy with geometric tiles as the language par excellence. However, such a practice would bring about two
negative implications. Firstly, the ethnic and geographic architectural expressions of Islamic architecture would be lost, due to perceived inferiority. This would greatly impair the message of Islam as an ideology which crosses all boundaries. Secondly, there would be no chance for any discourse on architecture such as the democratic and organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright to be considered as part of the potential ideas of Islamic architecture. This would widen the civilisation gap between Islam and the West and worsen the image of Islam as a separatist belief system. To prevent oversimplification of the notion of Islamic architecture, it is worth separating the discussion of values of the sunnah, the architectural transformation and the regional characteristic of the three types of built forms and settlements in Southeast Asia.

The Mosque and the community
The mosque is popularly associated with the main ideas of Islamic architecture. Discourses on the subject have always begun with a major description and analysis of this building type. There is, however, an alternative approach. Architecture begins or is born because of people who have beliefs and rituals. There is no architecture for architecture’s sake. Thus to talk of the mosque as a building before describing the nature of the Muslim community is what makes so much discussion of Islamic architecture a misguided endeavour. In Islam, for a person to be seen as a successful Muslim to the level considered mukmin, he or she has to fulfil both a personal set of devotions and another set of community responsibilities. Within these two responsibilities, the humanistic values of the sunnah must be inculcated as a sign of attaining the level of a mukmin.

The mosque is but one of the expressions of community responsibility. There seems to be a misunderstanding both among Muslims and non-Muslim scholars about this. Many seem to consider the mosque a personal temple of devotion, in which meditation to God is the ultimate aim in terms of action and space. There exist many hadith in which the Prophet placed much emphasis on community concerns, and there is none to suggest that the mosque is the best place for personal worship. It has been argued that the rituals of prayers or solat, seclusion or ibadah and recitation or tilawat are those related to community responsibilities. Those who turn the mosque into a personal temple of devotion have mistaken the idea of the sacred mosque as against the community mosque. In Islam, there are only three sacred mosques as stipulated by the hadith:

_Abu Hurairah narrated it directly from Allah’s Apostle having said this: A prayer in my mosque is a thousand times more excellent than in any other mosque except Masjid-al-Haram._

_(Sahih Muslim, Vol.2 pg. 697)_

The great edifices called mosques built throughout the Muslim world exist partly because of solat but solat does not need the fixed mosque to be valid. Thus, architecturally speaking, the more the
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ns and settlements in Southeast Asia.

Regional characteristics

There are three generic types of regional mosque design that can be distinguished, through historical
periodisation, as the Early Vernacular, the Colonial Adaptation and the Post-modern architectural
design. Nothing much is known of the original vernacular mosques that came with the spread of
Islam in the Malay Archipelago, the Malay Peninsula, Thailand and the Philippines. What has so far
been emphasised in recorded history is the pyramid or mena type of timber roof form, either placed
on stilts or covering a masonry colonnaded wall system with tiled floors. The other form, which
seldom engages the attention of scholars, is the gable type or buang bang, which resembles the
house form with the occasional exception of a tiered roof system or a small pyramid roof above the
main ridge.

The Kampung Tian mosque in Terengganu

Of the first type are the Kampung Laut and the Kampung Hulu Mosques in Malaysia, the
Masjid Agung Demak and the Banten Mosque in Indonesia and the Marawi Mosque in the
Philippines. The Pekan Mosque in Perak and the Ulu Machang Mosque in Negeri Sembilan are also
part of this typology, with the exception that they have a two-tiered roof form. The main feature of
this category of mosque is the obvious dominance of timber as the construction material. In a land
such as Indonesia, with massive classical stone temples left by the Hindu civilisation, this seems a
strange phenomenon. It might have been that the early Muslims rejected the idea of any association
with the multiple-God images of the Hindu faith; or simply that the early converts were not Hindu
aristocrats, who took their artisans, masons and builders back to the Indian mainland.

Southeast Asia’s first mosques were probably a basic timber structure which resembled earlier
structures such as the Balinese wadilan. The presence of the many-tiered roof form suggests a more
mystical purpose than the obvious need of providing a light source and ventilation for the dimly lit
interior. The presence of the four *soko-guru*, which are the main central columns, has also been celebrated as an important mystical presence that exists with the mosque. However, the presence of the curious Kampung Tuan Mosque in Terengganu, Malaysia throws this theory off-balance as this mosque is devoid of central columns. There are no soko-guru on this three-tiered structure which clearly boasts the most advanced timber-spanning system in the whole region – over 10 metres.

The other point of note is the use of the geometrically perfect square form of the mosques. Scholars have not attempted to investigate whether the square form was chosen simply because of the pyramidal roof structure or vice versa. Many seem content to think that the form of the pyramid and the square plan simply came as a semantic sacred package.

The less celebrated vernacular timber mosques are the *humbung panjang* type with a long gable roof structure over a rectangular plan raised on timber stilts. The Langgar Mosque in Malaysia and the Aur Manajung Mosque in Thailand are of the same typology. Why a mosque should be built in the rectangular or square manner is as yet unknown, but it does seem that the square form shows a certain kind of ‘royal sanctity’ in the sense that they were commissioned probably by religious scholars with strong ties to the aristocracy. The humbung panjang mosques seem to have been owned by those with few aristocratic connections. There is no evidence that they were adapted from a house, as there has never been an indication of any interior wall structures and support features.

The basic plan of these mosques usually begins with an enclosed square or rectangular floor, subsequently extending into a separate structure which is usually rectangular in shape. The extension of mosques is seen as an organic response to a growing community, and a new mosque is built when the capacity grows beyond 2,000 worshippers. The mosques of old were usually designed close to the river for the ritual ablution before prayers, and sometimes there is also a well dug in. The presence of a water trough is also useful during the dry season as water above a certain religiously determined amount can be used and reused.

The colonial interlude in mosque design in all the Nusantara world brought the popular Indian-style mosque with multiple- onion domes, lobed arches and two to four minarets standing tall besides great iwan-like gateways. Mostly there is a blend of Middle Eastern styles with that of the Indian ‘host’. The Masjid Jamek and Ubudiah Mosque in Malaysia and the Masjid Baitul-Rahman in Banda Aceh are testaments to these influences.

Modern and Post-modern discourses on architecture have also had much influence on mosque designs in the Southeast Asia. The modern movement brought with it basically two typologies of mosque design. The first type can be termed the ‘modern vernacular’, in which community mosques in housing estates are built using reinforced-concrete frame structures with brick in-fill walls. Their shape is almost always rectangular with an inner place for prayer and a perimeter *serambi* or verandah space for informal conversations, meals and even for sleeping. These new vernacular styles usually consist of a small metal dome over the *mihrab* or a huge steel ribbed
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dome over the central praying area.

The other two categories of modernism are those used for state mosques. One style is in the
structuralist mode, similar to the Negeri Sembilan State Mosque or the Penang State Mosque in
Malaysia. The Masjid Negara presents not only structuralist idealism in its folded plate roof, but also
utilises a metaphor for royalty in its umbrella-like presence. The Indonesian Istiqlal Mosque is a blend
between simple and sedate grid structures with a semi-circular dome of majestic silence. The simple
abstract forms devoid of obvious decoration are trademarks of the modernist ethos and are clearly
presented in the ITB Mosque by the famed Achmad Noeman in Bandung, Indonesia.

The Post-modern discourse opened up a Pandora’s box of historical forms, foreign exotic
styles and regionalism. The Sabah State Mosque features a play of structural interpretations of the
masjars in its interior, whilst its exterior presents a Middle-Eastern garb. The eclecticism of Iranian
inov and domes with Egyptian minarets are favourite tools of Malaysia’s Putra Mosque and Wilayah
Mosques. The Said Naumi Mosque is a fresh look at how the Nusantara meru regionalism presents
a modest and accessible presentation of Islam. All the mosques mentioned above show approaches to
Islam as different as the communities and people who commissioned them.

The house and the community in Islam
The architecture of the house can never be separated from that of the community. The house, the
mosque, waqf and the cemetery represent the four basic ‘social’ elements in Islam. Nowadays it seems
fashionable to speak of all four in isolation and to concentrate only on the unique architectural
features of these structures. The house is an important element in relation to its neighbourhood and
its need for privacy.

The arrangement of the spaces in a Muslim house is supposed to cater to several basic needs
and degrees of privacy. The first such degree is between society and the family. However, there must
be enough indication of social welcome in the sense of inviting the guests to grace the house. The
requirements of hospitality and the needs for privacy are given in the following hadith:

Abu Shuntoh at-Tabi’i reported the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) as saying: He who
believes in Allah and the last Day should honour his guest. Provisions for the road are what will serve
for a day and night, hospitality extends for three days; what goes after that is sadaqah (charity). And it
is not allowable that a guest should stay till he makes himself an encumbrance.
(Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. III, p. 1058)

Narated Sahih bn Sa’ad: A man peeped through a round hole into the dwelling place of the Prophet
while the Prophet was combing his hair. The Prophet said, “Had I known you were peeping, I would
have pierced your eye with the comb.” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 8, pg 171)
The serambi is the architectural feature most prominent after the landscaped lawn denoting the territory of the house. The serambi is the first architectural space that greets a stranger, and it also serves as a leisure place for the menfolk to converse. The serambi is sometimes used as a place for male guests to retire for the night. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was very particular in proclaiming Islam as a religion that encourages community interaction.

Next comes the mother house or rumah ibu, which is the space for formal occasions such as marriage ceremonies. Usually this space is divided between the anjing for the men and the nuang ibu for the womenfolk. The anjing also doubles as the sleeping area for unmarried men and male guests. The space between the rumah ibu and the dapur or kitchen is also considered a kind of separation between men and women, but it is only on formal occasions that this is the case. The Muslim house is generally oriented facing the qibla because the house doubles as a mosque for personal prayers and also for the ease of funerary rituals such as the bathing and prayers for the dead body. Toilets are supposed to be oriented away from the qibla, although there are exceptions for walled enclosures.

The house is many things to a Muslim. It is a shelter of privacy, a social unit of meeting, a mosque for prayers, and a place for weddings, the celebration of births, and for preparing the jenazah or bier for the final journey in this world. The house of a headman or tribal leader is usually equipped with a bigger serambi for the meeting of the menfolk to discuss the political affairs of the village. For the ulama or scholar, the house might not contain a kitchen as his food would be prepared by the students who built huts surrounding his house. This simple organisation led to the development of the pondok or pesantren institution, which functions as the most important educational and civilising element in a Muslim settlement. The architecture houses for headmen, ulama or chiefains is often difficult to distinguish, as Islam does not look favourably upon sumptuous monumentality in order to proclaim social hierarchy.

The waqf hut serves as one of the most important features in Islamic architecture. It is a simple
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Plan of a Malay house

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ut serves as one of the most important features in Islamic architecture. It is a simple structure with a roof and a platform to cater to the needs of the wayfarer. Among the teachings in the sunnah which encourage the existence of these community structures is this hadith about the continuing rewards received after death when a Muslim leaves some waqfs in this world:

Abu Hurairah reported the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) as saying: When a man dies, his action discontinues from his except three things; namely perpetual sadaqah (charity), or the knowledge by which benefit is acquired, or a pious child who prays for him.
(Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. II, p.812)

Traditional waqf of the Malay Peninsula

The architecture of the house, the waqf and the surrounding neighbourhood strictly adhere to the values of the sunnah and are represented in many different designs and forms in Southeast Asian communities. The sunnah is reinterpreted into the social and cultural norms of the place and given an honoured existence throughout.

Regional characteristics
House forms in Southeast Asia tend to take a more oblong shape, well suited for the bumbung panjang or long gable roof forms. The other characteristic of the traditional house is that it is built in separate units in which a totally organic growth can be achieved with the expansion of members and wealth of the family. The separate compartments of the rumah ibu or rumah dapur and even the anjung can be dismantled and given away to newlyweds to become the new rumah ibu. The Muslim