

## Research Article

# Mythological Spirit of Riau Malayan Islamic Culture as Reflected on Visual Artifacts

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Culture refers to human knowledge as social creatures used to understand, create, and interpret his experience and environment and embody the basic framework creating and encouraging the creation of behavior useful to a State's culture. Culture that spreads throughout archipelago underlies and characterizes an attempt of raising a certain region to be a city or a region's benchmark. Similarly, Riau city is the Malayan cultural center, with the majority of Muslim populations still maintaining and developing their sharia. Departing from this fact, research is conducted on the visual artifact of Riau Malayan culture with Islamic characteristics inherent to the elements supporting the traditional house (*rumah adat*). Viewed from the visual artifacts supporting this traditional house, there are some ornaments in the form of vines (flora creeping or climbing along a surface). To discover the product of Riau culture, a study is conducted with visual artifacts constituting the supporting elements and the ornaments of traditional house being the main object. The research was conducted through observing and interviewing and a document study was conducted on the old manuscripts and ornaments stored in the museum of Sang Nila Utama Riau Province. The data obtained from various sources were then validated using the triangulation method and then analyzed using Clive Bell's esthetic approach, "meaningful shape". The analysis was concentrated on the cultural mythology of Riau community, majority of who are Muslims, so that their kinship's social relation reflects Islam sharia. The result shows that visual cultural artifacts in the form of traditional house ornaments created by Riau people lead to human life and moral messages for human beings to socialize with His fellow creature, to obey His instruction, and to keep close to God who gives life and provides welfare.

**Keywords:** Riau, artifact, ornament, mythology, social-culturalCorresponding Author: Pujiyanto  
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## 1. Introduction

Culture, according to J.W.M. [1] is the creation, the order, and the processing of human values that humanizes nature and its produces. Nature, in this case, is natural material nature itself, physical and social environmental nature, values identified and developed in order to be perfect. Culturing nature, humanizing the life, and perfecting human relation are inseparable from each other as they are a unity. A culture can reflect typical character, for example, in behavior, hobby, or cultural objects created by its community members. Overall, culture can be classified by the existing components into: (1) cultural system, an abstract component of culture, consisting of thoughts, ideas, concepts, thinking themes, and belief; (2) social system consists of activities or interactions between individuals conducted in living within society, (3) personality system, anything pertaining to the content of spirit or the character of individual in its interaction as a member of a society, and (4) organizational system, the complement to all frameworks involving biological and biochemical processes existing inside human being. Personality, action pattern, and idea expressed by an individual contribute to determining its organic system [2].

Culture is the whole human knowledge as social creature used to understand and to create and to interpret his experience and environment and to be the basic framework creating and encouraging the creation of behavior or conduct. Culture intended in this article is different from action and product of action, as actually action is created referring to the culture the corresponding individual or society has. Culture grows and develops based on reasoning, intentionality, and perspective. And so does the Malayan culture in Riau. Malayan culture is a number of characteristics that can be found in the element of society life and Malayan culture can be seen from the elements of personality, society, language and letter, history, cultural value, and interaction pattern. Society element can be found in interaction pattern, governmental system, and custom. The custom of Riau Malayan community originated from Malacca and Johor as Malayan kingdom. Riau Malayan custom has three levels: (1) "*Adat sebenar adat* (Custom as an actual custom)", the standardized principle of Malayan custom that cannot be changed; (2) "*Adat yang diadatkan* (Customized custom)", a custom created by the ruler in certain period of time that can change along with the change of situation and time development and can be adjusted with the provision of custom prevailing; (3) "*Adat yang teradat* (traditional

custom)", a hereditary consensus that is held on together but can change along with the development of values.

One of provinces still maintaining Islamic-spirited Malayan culture is Riau. Considering the statements of Islam leaders in forum *Seminar Pemajuan Kebudayaan Melayu Riau dalam Rangka Menyelenggarakan Peringatan Milad Ke 49 Lembaga Adat Melayu Riau* (Seminar on Promoting Riau Malayan Culture in the attempt of Celebrating the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Riau Malayan Custom Institution) in the event "*Pekan Adat dan Budaya Melayu Riau Tahun 2019* (Riau Malayan Custom and Cultural Week in 2019)" there is a spirit of optimism that Malayan culture becomes the basic power of cultural spirit leading Malayan people to find their potency in the future (*Tim LAM Riau* [Riau Malayan Custom Institution Team], 2019). It is confirmed by Pujiastuti in his article entitled *Looking at Palembang through Its Manuscripts*, stating that Islam intellectual revived due to the presence of potency inherent since Sriwijaya[3]. This argument proves that Riau has Malayan cultural power until today, as indicated with the tangible evidence of Middle East-spirited artifact stored in Museum Sang Nila Utama located on Jenderal Sudirman Street No.194 Tangkerang Selatan Pekanbaru, Riau Province. It proves that Riau has the past Islamic Malayan cultural spirit influencing the development of present culture. Riau Malayan culture applies Islam sharia in the form of the ornament visual artifact. What forms of ornament do have meaning related to Divinity and human being as His creature in applying Islam tenet? This problem makes the author interested in studying the visual artifact as a product of Riau Malayan culture serving as warning, advice, and prayer to God.

## 2. METHOD

This research was conducted through exploring data using observation, interview, library study, and document study. These four techniques were used to obtain data as many as possible in order to get various findings during the research. The observation is opened in nature, i.e. adhering to cultural object, art, and subject existing in Riau region. For the larger number of observation data to be obtained, non-participatory observation technique was used, in which the author stays in the object observed. The interview used was structured one, an interview using interview guide as the specific form containing some instructions to direct the author in posing the questions related to the problem. Structure interview is a standardized, directed, guided interview within

which the statements specified before are organized using list of question used by the author to dig information from the informants. The technique refers to a situation when an author poses a series of questions to individual respondents based on the certain categories of question in general. Informants in this interview were cultural observers and scientists knowing about Riau Malayan culture. Document data is secondary data of research. For the document to be valid, the data needed should be authentic, credible, representative, and meaningful. Therefore, the author reads old manuscripts in Museum Sang Nila Utama of Riau Province. The data collected was then analyzed using Clive Vell's theory about "Meaningful form" [4]. the arrangement of formal components of a design artwork, so that the work triggers esthetic emotion in the author's mind leading to the mythology of Islam Malayan culture.

### 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The product of Riau Malayan culture contains some past heritages including traditional costume, traditional weapon, kitchen equipments, traditional house, and its supporting elements. This research is limited to the artifact of traditional house (*rumah adat*) and its supporting esthetic elements as they are considered as having uniqueness and interesting when connected to Malayan cultural Islamic esthetic values. Observing Riau traditional house, we can see the roof facing the sky constituting the typical shape of building put onto the roof of traditional house. The shape of roof of traditional house in Malayan region is reflected on the ornament of high roof, exactly on *limas* and *salembyung* roofs. Based on this typical characteristic of roof, an individual can distinguish Riau traditional house from other certain traditional houses, like Javanese and Sundanese Malayan traditional houses, or etc.

Malayan traditional houses have different shapes adjusted with the local condition of respective regions, but they have the same spirit as reflected on the end of house's roof. The roof of traditional house has cone-like shape and on the top of which confirmatory ornament is put with the shape in contrast to the roof of house. This contrast gives the house plus value, because what the public sees for the first time is the shape of house's roof tip. Malayan house is always decorated with ornament on its tip of roof making the building attractive and esthetic. Viewed from spirituality aspect, contextually the tip of traditional house's tip symbolizes the respect to God and the affection to fellow human beings, in which human is a social creature. *Limas* roof is triangle-shaped like the

roofs of Masjid Demak and Masjid Banten. In Malayan Riau region, the triangular-roof architecture style used in the traditional house building symbolizes its Divinity.

Another shape of roof is *Salembayung*, constituting an ornament of cross-shaped roof on both ends. *Salembayung* consists of two pairs of woods put on the right and the left sides containing male and female signs symbolizing unity, intimacy, kinship, harmony, compatibility of household. A thrown is put on the traditional house building to symbolize the presence of light insight house interpreted as life harmony, prestige, and safety of its dweller. To Malayan community, Salembayung is featured just like a tall end of elephant tusk, representing the importance of upholding the descents including grandchildren and grand-grand children. Visually, Salembayung roof contains leaf-and flower-like carving contextually symbolizing good custom, self-introspection, and a family's sustainability. Meanwhile, the carving on Salembayung has *sulur* (plants spiraling upward) shape symbolizing the recognition of God the Only One (Figure 1).

The glory of traditional house can be seen from the supporting ornament inside the room. The ornament elements on certain plane are always combined with those on other planes, so that the sense of unity seems to be created, resulting in esthetic composition inside house. The esthetic ornament of house lies on the floor, roof, wall, door, window, and pillar. The ornaments include picture or carving leaning to *relung* and *tumpal* shapes (Figure 2).

*Relung* or *sulur* ornaments can be found on the walls of traditional house and Governor Office building of Riau Province. This ornament seems to adorn the house's stairs consisting of five ladders, contextually believed to be a good number in Islam sphere, representing five pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam*): *Syahada* (faith), *Salah* (prayer), *zakat* (alms-giving), *sawm* (fasting) and *pilgrimage* (*Haji*). Muslims are considered as perfect when they have undertaken the five pillars of Islam. Ornaments adorning the house's stairs are *sulur* or *relung* constituting the plants creeping along the surface to the front, right, and left. Contextually, this ornament tells about human beings who live life in the world well or sometimes poorly, intentionally or unintentionally, with some good and bad trials; thus patience is require to pass the trial successfully.

*Tumpal* ornament used as the ornament of traditional house is put on the lower and upper parts of pillar or on the edge of plane or on the outline repeatedly with the same shape. The base of ornament is always connected to other ornament (basic ornament), and the tip is detached from the ornament leading to the empty space or other plane. Ornament is made pointed and then fading implying the focus of vision to the tip of



**Figure 1:** Selembayung on a Traditional House.



**Figure 2:** The ornament elements on a Traditional House.

ornament and then to the empty space. At a glance, there is no balance in the ornament but when observed more closely (with the feeling), there is a balance because the vision focuses on the tip of ornament. This ornament of traditional house is usually put on the

base and the tip of pillar making it attractive. Visually, *tumpal* ornament is featured facing upward just like the flaming fire or the tip of bamboo shoot (*pucuk rebuang*) growing. Textually, the ornament of bamboo shoot sticking out straightly upward symbolizes the youths in getting knowledge and achieving their great ideal. They should bend down (be humble) like bamboo when they has been old . Thus, contextually, *tumpal* ornament can be taken from the flare symbolizing the life spirit of human beings in working, serving, and praying to God.

Traditional house also contains esthetic interior and exterior supporting components like table, chair, buffet, partition (*rono*), room mirror, and decorative lights. The shape of ornament design inherent to the equipment (product) is affected by Chinese and Middle East cultures having ever transited in Malayan Islands. The power of design can be seen in the form of product and ornament creeping to the right and the left. The shape of equipment implies sturdiness because it is rigid, and textually implies strength and prestige and contextually representing glory and prestige of the space occupied by the equipment, so that interaction occurs between the equipments, the space, and the ones using them.

The ornament of vines (flora creeping and climbing along the surface) adorn strongly each plane of equipments. The creeping ornament is put in the center of thickness and breadth of plane of interior and exterior equipments. The ornaments always face upward and neither turns right nor turn left as the context of straight way, containing a warning for human beings to walk straightly despite others' influence. It means that in living the life, human beings should follow His instruction and avoid His prohibition. The ornament adorning the esthetic interior and exterior equipment is that of flora creeping and climbing upward with the same shape and style both in the right and in the left. The same organization in the right and in the left is intended to find balance and harmony without the need for ordering non-formal balance. This formal balance textually means *ora neko-neko* (keeping on the track), and contextually living in the world well, doing the best without harming others, and helping others. Fellow faithful men should strengthen, not harm, give, and help each other, just like a building of house, the components of which strengthen each other.

Most ornaments of Riau Malayan cultural artifact are taken from flora object and do not feature living creature. Riau communities know that using animate creatures as the ornament of object is prohibited in Islam. A hadith narrated by Bukhari says that Rasulullah SAW said "whoever draws a living creature, he will be asked to breathe spirit

into the image on the last day, while he does not a power to do so". It is also narrated in *Bukhari and Nasai*, "Actually angel will not get into a house in which there are dog and image of living creature".

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The conclusion is that the artifacts of Riau Malayan cultural product inherent to building, ornament of building, esthetic interior and exterior supporting components are the evidence of the integration of Middle East and Malayan cultures. The integration of two or more cultures becomes cultural assimilation, acculturation, adaptation due to the influence of Middle Eastern merchants in delivering their commodities through the sea and transiting in Riau. The past artifacts as the heritage of Riau Malayan culture contain Islamic spiritual symbolic values and advice about living within society. Design of object and ornament on it contain life philosophy, meaning that contextually human beings as His creature should worship obligatorily in order to get His mercy. In any condition, an individual should get bless and protection from Allah. Obeying His instruction and avoiding His prohibition are the search for perfection before the Almighty. Behaving and saying good words, appreciating fellow human beings, helping the needy, and giving alms in the world are the means of getting heaven. Therefore, Malayan artifacts have function and meaning of hope and goal, so that human beings should think positively, with clear mind (*sumeleh*) and the feeling of grateful for everything Allah has given.

The recommendation given is that Islamic Riau Malayan culture should be maintained and developed through regenerating the youths in order to prevent them from being influenced by western culture creating westernization style. To prevent the next generations from being influenced by Western cultures, Islam sharia cultural foundation is required, so that they will not lose local culture that has contributed to raising the next generation of Riau Malayan communities. Therefore, Riau Malayan traditional house should be preserved and be cultural reserve protected by the government, if necessary, as visual information media. Similarly, the artifacts stored in Museum Sang Nila Utama should serve as culture-based media education particularly for the students.



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