

Mimbar Design Motifs in Pre-Independence Mosques in Ipoh Perak

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Abstract

Mimbar is where *Khatib* delivers a sermon before the Friday prayer begins. Undeniably, a *mimbar* built before the independence era in Malaysia is hard to find today, and there are deficiencies in research on the mosques' *mimbar* motifs. This research aims to identify the motifs on the *mimbar* before the independence era, particularly in Ipoh, Perak. Therefore, this research significantly benefits the future generation and nurtures their knowledge regarding the extrinsic values of the *mimbar*'s aesthetics and the intrinsic meaning of its motifs that contribute to developing *mimbar* motifs in art and architecture in Malaysia and share the motifs' character representing Perak's state.

Keywords: *Mimbar*, Motif, Influence, Mosque

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1.0 Introduction

A mosque is one of the important buildings or monuments of Islamic civilisation. All men are obliged to gather at the mosque for prayers. The mosque is not only a place for prayer, but it is seen as a symbol of calmness and peace. With the presence of a mosque, the Muslim society can feel a sense of belonging in that area. The history of mosques has significance in the lives of Muslims; it is the main centre for all activities of Muslims, even if the mosque is simple as time progresses. The mosque's structure is a manifestation of the existence of a community, symbolising the superiority of Islam and its adherents as well as the shadow of the civilisation of the surrounding community. A mosque has several vital characteristics: *minaret*, *mihrab*, *mimbar*, place of ablution, *muqarnas*, and dome. These elements are essential in constructing the mosque (Manja & Ahmad, 1995) and should be presented. (Tawalinuddin et al, 2011). It can be seen that every mosque has different designs under the cultural elements of a community. The *mimbar* and *mihrab* are the two vital elements in the design of a mosque. The place of preaching to the congregation, especially during Friday prayers, while the *mihrab* is where the direction of the *Qibla* is shown and becomes the axis within the space of a mosque. The *mimbar* consists of several design structures on each part of the architecture, complemented by the structure's beauty with implicit and explicit meaning. Every meaning can be seen and appreciated through design structures that can be thought of directly and indirectly. In the design of the *mimbar*, certain symbols are used to communicate to the community so that they can be quickly understood. This research focuses on identifying the type of motif, classifying the motifs, and studying the extrinsic and intrinsic meaning of the motif on selected *mimbar* before the independence era at Perak. The review of related literature directly assists in a particular inquiry.

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2.0 Literature Review

Culture is constantly changeless everywhere. It is dynamic. Some cultures are developed and standardised in the social traditions of a society. Thus, the nature of culture is developing as an outcome of human adaptation to its environment. Culture continuously adapts to evolutionary change, and nothing can remain, though some might continue to defend it. All aspects of life in this world must evolve to change according to the social conditions of society. History proves that every aspect of material culture expands in line with the socio-cultural dynamics of society. Local studies related to Malay traditional woodcarving geometric pattern design through its philosophy, like Basaree et al. (2015) and Abdullah et al. (2015), focus on motifs of songket design classification of frieze patterns. Indeed, art and architecture are the outcomes of the creativity of human beings, as individuals or groups in society have produced them. Thus, the socio-cultural changes in society will influence art and architectural design. The authentic values of the culture will be revealed and seen in the design composition. Usually, the architectural style of the mosque is based on culture, geography, religious understanding, and the level of efficiency in decorating the form of design. Art, design, and architecture are always integrated contextually into a particular era and become an asset to every culture's visual expression. Culture also helps humans assemble architecture and design that are developed, to this day, in sequence with the development of human thought (Trisulowati, 2008). The comprehensive review of Malay art and architecture, which relate to the heritage of the mosque, was reviewed in the next segment.

2.1 Malay Art and Architecture

The arrival of Islam to the Malay World envisaged the transformation of its art and architectural features into local elements. Malay art and craft philosophy can be seen embedded with Islamic thought and understanding. Art and architecture manifest their culture and the *Weltanschauung* of the society. The natural environment of tropical rainforests and multiple species have developed various motifs and designs. The harmonious relationship between artisans and the environment moulded the aesthetical conception of Malay art and architecture. They have produced some of the most spectacular and finest work of timber craftwork in the region since the pre-independence era. The forms and motifs long seen in Malay woodcarving are influenced by nature, such as flora, the environment, natural elements, the cosmos, and Islamic design. Some early pre-Islamic themes and motifs are still evident today, manifested in stylised or abstract forms. Many of the motifs used by the Malay artisans can be seen in a traditionally carved ornamental embellishment on the *mimbar*. They are not simply for aesthetic appeal but portray specific meanings and philosophy. As patterns and motifs play an essential role in ensuring aesthetic value in Malay woodcarvings, selecting suitable motifs is an integral part of the process, and a carver will exercise care in choosing the motifs based on various influences or elements.

The cosmos has inspired Malay carvers to create designs featuring sun, moon, and star motifs, sometimes seen adorned by *mimbar* in mosques. The arabesque '*awan larat*' (floating cloud) is another commonly used Malay motif in decorating the design of the *mimbar*. Plants are widely featured in Malay woodcarvings because of their close association with daily life. Various parts of plants and trees, including leaves, roots, creepers, fruits, flowers, and branches. Among other popular motifs are '*ketam guri*', '*sulur bayung*', and '*bunga matahari*' (sunflower) motifs, symbolising a beautiful world as the sun brings brightness, turning night into day. At the same time "*bunga Melati*" (jasmine) epitomises Malay customs and courtesies. The '*sulur kacang*' motif has a more profound symbolism, and the design emanates from a hidden central seed (which represents God) and sprouts identical curling foliage branching out left and right (which shows God's creations in pairs). For generations, the Malay worldviews were constricted by thoughts and beliefs.

2.2 The Heritage Mosque in Perak

There are many heritage mosques in Perak, such as *Masjid India Muslim* (1908), *Masjid Paloh* (1912), *Masjid Panglima Kinta* (1898), *Masjid Kota Lama Kanan* (1916), *Masjid Teluk Memali* (1910), *Masjid Iskandariah* (1936), and *Masjid Ubudiah* (1917). The heritage mosque is an example of material culture that has long been built and has unique architecture and ornamental designs. Observation and interviews were conducted to gather information regarding the *mimbar*. However, the lack of research on mosque *mimbar* motifs in Malaysia due to unlettered research documentation in this area of study causes the historical heritage of the past to have great potential to be forgotten. According to Syarifah Fatimah Zubir (1980), society now lacks an understanding of the symbols and meanings associated with artistic elements from traditional handicrafts such as wood carving. Thus, understanding the meaning of wood carving art greatly influences sculptors and spectators, especially art makers, in understanding the actual value of motifs and patterns.

3.0 Methodology

This research administrative qualitative research method comprises library and field studies. In this study, the data collected are subjected to the motifs found on the *mimbar* of the old mosque around Ipoh, Perak, due to the higher intensity number of mosques built along the time frame of a pre-independence era in the mentioned state compared to other states in Malaysia. This descriptive and observational research can provide insight to the researcher for specific questions with interviews, observation, record analysis, and literature review. For secondary data collection, the researchers conducted a library study of journals, academic theses, books, and articles related to *mimbar* and mosque architecture. This research was conducted to get information related to the motifs found on the *mimbar* of mosques in Ipoh Perak, namely the Panglima Kinta Mosque, Paloh Mosque, and Teluk Memali Mosque.













4.0 Findings






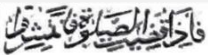


The *mimbar* design of each mosque is different based on its geographical location, culture, and society from all over the world (see Table 1 to Table 7). Outsiders influence several *mimbar* designs regarding colonisation factors or spiritual development brought to the

particular district. The analysis of these three mosques found that Paloh Mosque and Panglima Kinta Mosque have a placement and similar motif characteristics with different names. Teluk Memali Mosque looks quite different from the design of Paloh Mosque and Panglima Kinta Mosque. The carved motifs are found on the roof of the mimbar, the prominent carving, the pillars of the mimbar, the place where the preacher reads the sermon, the carving below, the stairs, and the site of the mimbar. The placement of the carved motifs is also the same, and there is no distinction between them. Looking at the type of motifs used, flora and calligraphy motifs are most widely used because they align with Islamic teachings prohibiting figure-shaped motifs. The concept of art appreciation of beauty in Islamic philosophy is related to the vertical relationship between humans and God (Allah SWT) and horizontal relationships between humans and humans. Al-Ghazali interprets the concept of beauty as being parallel with 'perfection'. Every perfection gives a sense of satisfaction to the audience (Mohamed Ali, 1983).

4.1 Mimbar Masjid Panglima Kinta, Ipoh, Perak

Table 1. Actual Picture; (b) Traced Outline *Mimbar Masjid Panglima Kinta*.

Mosque	Traced Outline	Motif Types
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (flower)
		Combination Motif (arrow and leaves)
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (flower)

		Fauna (Sisik Naga)
		Flora (flower)
		Combination motif (flora and vase)
		Flora (flower)
		Combination Motif (flower, leaves and vase)
		Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)
		Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)
		Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)

(Source: Mimbar Masjid Panglima Kinta, Ipoh, Perak)

Table 2. Classification of Panglima Kinta Mimbar Motifs.

Flora Motif	Fauna Motif	Calligraphy Motif	Combination Motif
Flowers - 5	Sisik Naga - 1	Khat Thuluth - 6	Arrow and leaves – 1
Leaves - 4			Vase leaves flower – 1
Bud - 2			Flora and vase - 1

4.1.1 The External Design

The features of the *mimbar* are unique, with decorative designs comprising a combination of Moghul and Neoclassical motifs. Various floral motifs are carved on the *mimbar* of Panglima Kinta Mosque. Among the flora motifs that can be seen is the foliage motif commonly used by the Indian community.














4.1.2 The Intrinsic Meaning














The *mimbar* designs have shown meaning as a reflection of a society with excellent skills and knowledge. Those symbols and carvings are not confined to their aesthetical aspect; they have been decorated for society to appreciate and comprehend their meaning. As such,








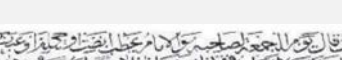

it is an educative function of sharing thoughts and ideas. This motif is arranged to convey the concept of calmness. Through the ultimate sense of perception and beauty found in a *mimbar*, there is meaning, which portrays the interrelation of the Almighty God that transcends the sensorial part of human beings. The motifs of the *mimbar* can attract human attention and create a feeling of love for the greatness of theology. With the senses, the body and soul will always be calm by looking at the elements of Islamic designs. The features found in this *mimbar* will also provide metaphors and philosophical meanings besides its aesthetic values.

4.2 *Mimbar Masjid Paloh, Ipoh, Perak*

Table 3. *Paloh Mimbar Motif Types.*

Mosque	Traced Outline	Motif Types
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (bud)
		Flora (flower/leaves)
		Flora (leaves)
		Fauna (sisik naga)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (leaves)
		Cosmos (moon and star)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (leaves)

		
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (bud)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (bud)
		Flora (bud)
		Cosmos (star)
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (leaves)
		Combination Motif (flower, leaves and vase)

	Flora (flower)
	Flora (flower)
	Flora (leaves)
	Flora (leaves)
	Flora (leaves)
	Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)
	Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)
	Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)
	Calligraphy (Khat Thuluth)

(Source: Mimbar Masjid Paloh Motifs, Perak)

Table 4. Classification of Masjid Paloh Mimbar Motifs, Perak.

Flora Motif	Fauna Motif	Cosmos Motif	Calligraphy Motif	Combination Motif
Flowers - 12	Sisik Naga – 1	Moon – 1	Khat Thuluth - 4	Flower/Leaves/Vase - 1
Leaves - 10		Star - 2		
Bud - 4				

4.2.1 The External Design










The carving symbols illustrate the cultural and historical significance of making *mimbars*. There is an arrangement of foliage, flowers, and decorations. The cosmology element is also found intersecting within space. It shows the height of knowledge and skills of the Malays in making this *mimbar*.

4.2.2 The Intrinsic Meaning

The *mimbar*'s design portrays the artisans' invaluable talent, skills, and knowledge. The form and symbols are not meant for their physical appearances, but they were built for society to understand their implicit meaning. It shows the concepts of intimacy, delicateness, unity, and completeness. Meaning it is a transforming process of understanding allegorical and symbolism. The sense of beauty involves its implicit meanings and philosophy. The designs of the *mimbar* have a meaningful impact on society. Within the transcendental space, they focus on exploring spirituality, being, and flourishing. Spirituality is an essential component in the healing and protection of the mind. The spiritual tradition contains various appreciations, practices, and beliefs that can be analysed for therapeutic benefits.

4.3 Mimbar Masjid Teluk Memali, Ipoh Perak

Table 5. Teluk Memali Mimbar Motif Types.

Mosque	Traced Outline	Motif Types
		Cosmos (moon and star)
		Calligraphy (Khat Nasakh)
		Flora (flower)
		Flora (leaves)
		Flora (flower)
		Combination Motif (Floral and Geometry)
		Geometry (flower)
		Flora (leaves)

(Source: Mimbar Masjid Panglima Kinta, Ipoh, Perak)

Table 6. Classification of Teluk Memali Mimbar Motifs.

Flora Motif	Cosmos Motif	Geometry Motif	Calligraphy Motif	Combination Motif
Flowers - 2	Moon - 1	Pucuk Rebung - 1	Khat Nasakh - 1	Flora and Geometry - 1
Leaves - 2	Star - 1			




4.3.1 The External Design

The plant element used in this *mimbar* is placed on the top of the *mimbar* roof crown. It moves upwards spirally like the letter and sprouts at the ends. The architecture of this *mimbar* assembles the shape of a pyramid with a motif of bamboo shoots. There is a complete pattern on the sides and under the roof of the *mimbar*. The structure of the *mimbar* has three steps made from wooden planks with no carving in the middle of the stairs. The type of calligraphy used is Thuluth, and the cosmos motifs of the moon and stars are also displayed—the motif of "sulur bayur" is used due to its softness, and the spiral movement represents the pleasing for the viewer's sight. These moon and star motifs represent the Islamic concept of the universe. The calligraphy is in *thuluth*, which is subtle and easy to form with unique lines. This calligraphy is decorative and has its own unique style and letter characters.

4.3.2 The Intrinsic Meaning

Each carving has its natural uniqueness according to the expression of the artisans' souls. This beauty will not be produced without the reference and guidance from their ancestors. The beauty in Islam is taken from the word 'Asma ul Husna', the Names of Allah SWT, which describes the wealth of nature. The people and followers of Allah SWT must believe that the concept of beauty in Islamic art brings people closer to the Creator by remembering and acknowledging His greatness. Beauty is not only outwardly but also inwardly, which involves the use of intellectuality and the ability to know the essence of its beauty.

Table 7. Characteristics of three selected *Mimbar* mosques

Mosque	<i>Panglima Kinta</i>	<i>Paloh</i>	<i>Teluk Memali</i>
The Overall <i>Mimbar</i> Design			
The External Design	The exterior design comprises: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Composition of the combination of Moghul and Neoclassical motif ii. Flora motif (foliage motifs used by the Indian community) 	The external design comprises of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Composition of the combination of Moghul and Neoclassical motif ii. Flora motif (foliage motif used by Indian community) 	The external design comprises of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Assembly of the shape of the pyramid ii. Plant element <i>sulur bayur</i> iii. Calligraphy <i>Khat Thuluth</i> iv. Cosmos motif moon and star
The Intrinsic Meaning	The intrinsic meaning comprises of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Conveyance of the concept of calmness ii. Aesthetical values iii. Metaphors iv. Philosophical v. Ultimate sense of the Almighty God 	The intrinsic meaning comprises of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Intimacy, delicateness, unity and completeness ii. Allegorical iii. Symbols 	The intrinsic meaning comprises of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. '<i>Asma ul-Husna</i>' beauty in Islam ii. Bringing people closer to the Creator iii. A belief that beauty is not only outwardly but also inwardly

5.0 Discussions

The findings of the case study show that the *local community's culture influenced the mosque's mimbars*. The architecture of the *mimbar* occurred due to several factors: the influence of religion, the socio-economic situation of the community, and the sovereignty of society at that time. The use of calligraphy motifs on the *mimbar* acknowledges the greatness of Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad SAW. These carvings are usually located on a specific part that is related to the function of the carving. Quranic verses and hadiths of the Prophet are often used as inspiration in calligraphic motifs to urge artisans to write and the audience to read. Through this engraved writing, knowledge can be spread, and divine wisdom can be approached. Thus, the understanding of the extrinsic and intrinsic value of motifs and design of mosque *mimbar* literates' solution for the problem statements of this research, where lack of understanding of the symbols and meanings associated with artistic elements from traditional handicrafts such as wood carving (Syarifah Fatimah Zubir, 1980). This research can be carried out from a deeper perspective of the evolution of *mimbar* motifs throughout different time frames, including but not limited to the study of motif influences and symbolism.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research showed that the mosques in Ipoh, Perak, have the same carving motifs of flora, geometry, and calligraphy as other shapes. It occurs based on core beliefs supported by several important factors such as religious factors, beliefs, customs, philosophy, and the environment. These three motifs are the basic motifs available at the *Paloh Mosque*, *Panglima Kinta Mosque*, and *Teluk Memali Mosque*. The artisans were innovative by looking for new ideas and processes in producing more carefully finished carvings and engraving quality that will likely be respected and not plagiarised by outside influences. The motif outcomes have meaning and enable them to express the attributes of life through the art of mosque *mimbars*. Several limitations of this research were identified, such as the lack of government-archived information on the pre-independence era mosques documented, the uninviting locational of mosques with undeveloped rural transportation convenience, and the availability of living proof of the person in charge of the data collection process. Thus, this research suggests the Malaysian government, through the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture and the Ministry of the Prime Minister's Department for Religious Affairs, have proper archived documentation in digital platforms to enhance wider knowledge sharing for theoretical and societal groups of beneficiaries. With improvement through recommendations stated, new

research directions can be strategised regarding the evolution of motifs not only on mimbars but also on minaret, mihrab, place of ablution, muqarnas, and dome.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The paper contributes to Islamic architecture, historical studies, and cultural heritage.

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