



MALAYSIAN ECLECTIC SOCIAL IDENTITY AND ITS  
REFLECTION IN ART & ARCHITECTURE:  
MASJID WILAYAH AS A CASE STUDY

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for  
the degree of Master of Art in Islam and other Civilization

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## ABSTRACT

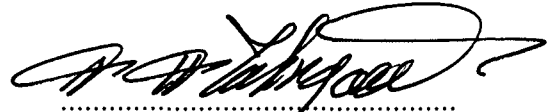
Eclectic architecture emerged and gained rapid momentum in the field of Malaysian mosque architecture during the past two decades. It appears that the multicultural fabric of Malaysian society and its welcoming attitude towards outside world in the past couple of decades have contributed immensely to the creation of suitable environment for the acceptance of foreign influence, especially in the field of art & architecture. This has prepared grounds for the appearance of numerous eclectic mosques on the Malaysian urban plane. The eclectic style of Malaysian mosques has not been the subject of many researches. This study deals mostly with the social and cultural grounds of eclectic architecture in Malaysia. After determining the process of eclectic mosque architecture in Malaysia, this research provides a somewhat critical analysis of Masjid Wilayah as a prominent example of eclectic mosque architecture. The library research and personal observation of mosque architecture are the basic methods used in this study. Investigating mosques with eclectic architecture at different periods of time in Malaysian mosque architecture revealed that the eclectic mosques were built during the British period and have a dominant style which includes elements and details from other styles too. However, today eclectic mosques try to have different elements from various styles and combine all together in a single work. This research discusses the forms and functions of the Wilayah Mosque and traces its features, i.e. dome, minaret, minbar, mihrab, to their regional/historical origins namely Ottoman, Persian, Mughal, Malay and Moroccan.

## ملخص البحث

ظهرت العمارة انتقائي و اكتسبت زخما سريعا في مجال عمارة المساجد الماليزية خلال العقدين الماضيين. يبدو أن النسيج المتعدد الثقافات للمجتمع الماليزي و الترحيب موقفها تجاه العالم الخارجي في العقدين الماضيين ساهمت بشكل كبير في خلق بيئة مناسبة لقبول النفوذ الأجنبي ، وخاصة في مجال الفن والعمارة . وقد أعدت هذه الأسباب لظهور العديد من المساجد انتقائي على متن الطائرة الحضرية الماليزية. لم يكن أسلوب انتقائي من المساجد الماليزية موضوع العديد من الأبحاث. تتناول هذه الدراسة في الغالب مع الأسس الاجتماعية والثقافية للعمارة انتقائي في ماليزيا. بعد تحديد عملية انتقائي عمارة المساجد في ماليزيا ، يقدم هذا البحث تحليلا نقديا نوعا من مسجد ولاية كمثل بارز للعمارة المسجد انتقائي . مكتبة الأبحاث والمراقبة الشخصية ل عمارة المساجد هي الأساليب الأساسية المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة. التحقيق مع الهندسة المعمارية انتقائي المساجد في فترات مختلفة من الوقت في عمارة المساجد الماليزية كشفت أن المساجد انتقائي بنيت خلال الفترة البريطانية ولها أسلوب المهيمن الذي يضم عناصر وتفاصيل من الأساليب الأخرى أيضا. ومع ذلك، اليوم انتقائي المساجد في محاولة ل دينا عناصر مختلفة من أساليب مختلفة والجمع بين كل ذلك معا في عمل واحد . يناقش هذا البحث في أشكال ووظائف المسجد ولاية و يتتبع معاملة ، أي القبلة ، مئذنة ، المنبر ، المحراب ، إلى أصولها الإقليمية / التاريخية وهي العثمانية والفارسية و المغولية ، الملايو و المغربي .


## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic Spiritual Culture & Contemporary Society).



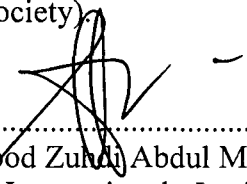
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Date ..25...Nov...2014

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REFLECTION IN ART & ARCHITECTURE:  
MASJID WILAYAH AS A CASE STUDY**

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## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ء	'	خ	kh	ش	Sh	غ	Gh	ن	N
ب	B	د	D	ص	ṣ	ف	F	هـ	H
ت	T	ذ	dh	ض	ḍ	ق	Q	و	W
ث	Th	ر	r	ط	ṭ	ك	K	ي	Y
ج	J	ز	z	ظ	ẓ	ل	L		
ح	ḥ	س	s	ع	ʿ	م	M		

Short Vowels	
ـَ	a
ـِ	i
ـُ	u

Long Vowels	
ا + ـَ	ā
ي + ـِ	ī
و + ـُ	ū

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Eclecticism, which is the subject of this research, manifests when elements from different structural, spatial and decorative forms and styles, carrying features representing specific and distinct cultures combine in a single work, chiefly in architecture.<sup>1</sup>

Malaysia's geographical location and its socio-cultural texture pave the way for new ideas and influences from outside, both East and West which formed a multicultural country, hosting races from various backgrounds, chiefly Malay, Indian and Chinese. The contemporary diversity and multicultural influences in Malay culture, lifestyle, art and architecture may be the result of its welcoming attitude towards the outside world.

This culture of generally accepting foreigners by most Malaysians comes from historical times, especially since Malaya has been dominated by colonial powers for more than three centuries. Certainly this has gradually affected Malay traditional culture and their psyche.

During the last few decades, in terms of its new politics and social conditions, Malaysia has broadened its context to include ideas from the other countries and cultures. This transformation has manifested on different areas, namely social habits, economy, politics, religious beliefs, etc. Among these manifestations, art and architecture are prominent, as they register and reflect in a visual manner, the transformation that the society has gone through within a span of time.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Eclecticism" in *The Dictionary of Art*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Vol. 9

Among architectural works in Malaysia mosques are chosen as focus point of this study. Mosques are mostly one of the ways to project Islam to the world, as it is an observable sign of Islam. It is also in line with Malaysian policy to introduce itself as part of the Islamic Ummah to the rest of the world. Malaysian mosques are perfect examples that show the blend of different styles and cultural influences. This has led to the formation of mosque designs that can be classified as eclectic architecture. This study focuses on eclectic art and architecture. Among the prominent works in eclectic architecture, Wilayah mosque is chosen as an appropriate case study in this research.

## **1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The mosque is a conspicuous feature of a Malaysian landscape and we can see a wide variety of mosques in prominent towns and cities built in eclectic style which is more prevalent than in many other Muslim-populated countries. It appears that the related fine arts also follow a similar pattern.

Does this tendency have anything to do with the multicultural/multiethnic texture of Malaysian society? Could the open-door policy of the government in the last 2-3 decades have contributed to this trend? Has the national will to place Malaysia more prominently on the global scene and its proactive participation in global Islam, find artistic expression in the widespread eagerness to produce eclectic style mosques?

The questions addressed are the main issues which will be discussed in this research.

## **1.3. SCOPE OF STUDY**

We will base our discussion about eclecticism on a background of eclecticism, its origin, process of spreading over and its examples in some different countries. In this

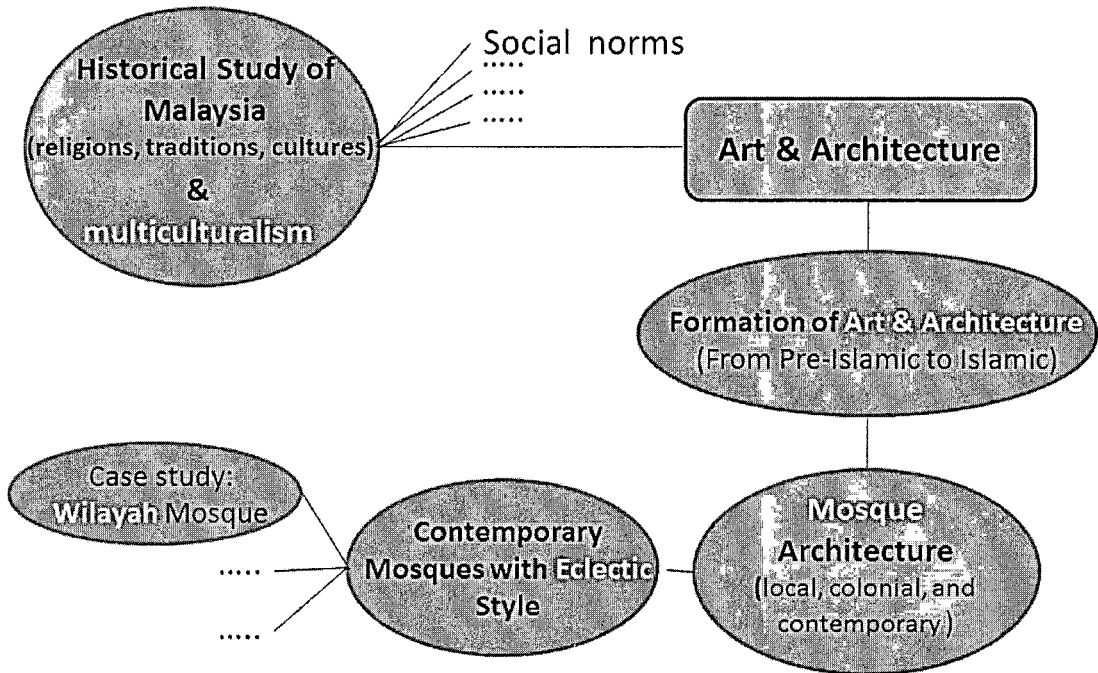
part lack of enough sources about eclectic architecture in different countries limited this research to some existing example of eclecticism such as Turkey, Egypt and other relevant countries.

The next part include historical study of Malaysia, which would provide information about religions, languages, traditions, cultures, with a focus on the multicultural quality of Malaysia and its socio-cultural interactions which exists between different ethnic groups.

This multiculturalism goes beyond social norms, and penetrates in the realm of art and architecture. Among different kinds of buildings and architectures this study is studying the mosques as one of the Islamic signs in Malaysia, a Muslim country.

In line with the multicultural nature of Malaysia the formation of eclectic mosque architecture is the main focus of this study. This part will cover the formation of mosque architecture from traditional and pre-Islamic architecture, to the emergence of Islamic typology architecture and culture. This extends to the contemporary era and the modern architecture scenario. This part comprises the local, colonial, and contemporary mosque architecture in Malaysia. The emphasis of this part is related to mosques that are built in eclectic style. As a case study, Wilayah Mosque is chosen as an outstanding example of a mosque with eclectic architecture. Therefore, the research examined and assessed Wilayah Mosque from an artistic, architectural as well as social viewpoints primarily from an eclectic perspective.

## Scope of Study



### 1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study the multiracial/multicultural fabric of Malaysian society as a ground for the emergence of eclectic architecture.
- To detect the process of formation of eclecticism in Malaysian art and architecture.
- To investigate the present position of eclectic social-artistic texture of Malaysia.
- To evaluate the social-artistic and architectural aspect of mosques built in an eclectic style.

## **1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. There are different methods to meet the above research objectives. Each method was selected according to the demand of each research objective. One of the methods usually use for studying the historical process is library search. For this dissertation where the emerging eclecticism in Malaysian architecture is focus upon, most of the data acquired were mainly through the library search.

This method can address the historical aspects of Malaysian architecture and a suitable way to collect information on the social fabric of Malaysia and its cultural diversity qualitatively.

To evaluate the social-artistic and architectural aspect of mosques hypothetically built in eclectic style, research applies library research as the background frame work where the original architectural styles were studied and traced through its socio matrix influences to the physical outcome imitated or integrated in the architecture, for this study as eclectic mosques. Personal observations and assessment formulated based on the background frame work, were able to evaluate the social activities, the crafts and technology of the Wilayah Mosque, as a case study, to achieve the research objectives.

## **1.6. LIMITATIONS**

Within the study period and availability of resources from literature review, observations and interviews there were some limitation and obstacles. This include an initiation to interview with some local architects like architect of Wilayah mosque, but it could not succeed due to his absence in Malaysia at certain time was needed.

Though to the construction works in Wilayah Mosque some parts were closed and out of access during that certain period. Researcher also failed to get an accurate plan drawing of Wilayah Mosque from JKR in spite of sending emails and requests to that company.

In the case of library search there were only a limited books and articles written on eclectic architecture and also one was on Malay language which was not usable for researcher. Another subject that had few sources was explanation of new and recently built mosques of Malaysia. The lack of comprehensive books about architecture and details of new Malaysian mosques was noticeable.

## **1.7. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There were not many written books and research around the concept of eclectic architecture and its traces in Malaysia. A reference that can provide us with a good basic understanding of eclecticism in Malaysia is *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia*, Chen Voon Fee (ed.)(1998).

One section of this Encyclopedia, explains the story of Malaysian architecture in searching for its own identity upon independence. The chapter also covers the process of constructing buildings by British architects who had incorporated Mogul and Neo-classical style from their background experiences in other British empires specially India. It also explains how the diversity of different communities and their own local styles created a blend of architectural styles which evolved into an eclectic architecture style in Malaysia. The influence of each group such as the Indians, British, and Chinese has been explored in different sections of this encyclopedia. In addition to describing the Malaysian architectural evolution, in various phases, this reference also examines modern architecture trends in Malaysia.

As far as the history and cultural aspects of Malaysia are concerned, there is a large volume of published studies which describes such aspects from the perspective of Malaysia as a multicultural country. A comprehensive study which covers a good amount of historical information about the Malay community and other ethnic groups in Malaysia is written by Daniels (2005), entitled "*Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia*". He investigates the cultural, categories, hybridity, and identity schema of Malay world in the third chapter of his book. In this chapter he attempts to clarify the meaning of 'Malay', "Chinese", and "Indian" cultural categories and he also accurately identifies the original Malay people, the various communities which constitute being Malay, religion, their life style, their geographical areas, their dwellings, their language, food, cloths, politic and other areas. Almost the same issues are considered for Chinese and Indian community.

Another work that covers some parts of this subject is "*Muslim Converts in Malaysia: The problem of Cultural Adjustment*" by Osman Chuah Abdullah (2008). After introducing the background of Malaysia and its three communities, Chuah described the ethnic relationships which exist in Malaysia, and explains how the British had merged the different groups in this country, how the ethnic groups interacted with each other. He also provided a brief description about the ethnic identity of each group. However his study focused mainly on these different ethnic groups who had converted to Islam after their immigration to Malaysia, which is related to the socio-cultural aspect of this research.

For general information about different aspects of Malaysian life, "the Encyclopedia of Malaysia" provides good source of useful information. It is in 16 volumes and covers general information about this country. Although the information about each topic is condensed in one or two pages of the book, which also includes

related pictures and paintings, this book does not go into sufficient depth about each subject. It only provides the researcher with broad and general information on the subject through points, key words and phrases. Thus it requires further research and exploration. In this research the most useful volumes are those with titles relating to the environment, the early history of Malaysia, architecture, performing arts, language and literature, religion and beliefs, people and traditions, crafts and visual arts as well as general information about the country's economy.

The next reference which provides useful content for this research is an article by Abdul Rahman Embong, entitled "Malaysia as a multicultural society". Abdul Rahman starts with giving general information about the history of Malaysia and the Malay community, their attitude, and unique characteristics. The effect of Islam on Malay society is discussed in this article, while its main focus describes the clash between the Malays and the colonialists, and finally the impact of Western colonialism on Malay society. This research serves as an analytical model for Malaysia after independence.

There are many worthy studies and literature about the scope of Malaysian art and its stages of development. Such references cover either the traditional arts of Malaysia or modern arts. Leigh (2000) highlighted some aspects of Malaysian arts in her book, "*The changing face of Malaysian crafts: identity, industry, and ingenuity*". She actually collected samples of traditional Malaysian art such as batik, metal ware, songket, and woodcarvings. In this book she portrayed her view about how these various forms of traditional art have become part of Malaysia's cultural heritage and identity in the last few decades. She discusses both the ingenuity of the practicing craftsmen and also the technological advances made in Malaysia's craft industry.

Among the Malay arts, wood carving is one of the most prominent and artistic works. In this range the book of "*Spirit of Wood: The Art of Malay Woodcarving*", by Farish and Eddin (2003), introduces the skilled art by master carvers from Kelantan, Trengganu and Pattani. This book is embellished by lavish photographs of woodcarvings and discussions around some aspects of Malay woodcarving. In this book, there are good examples of line drawings which can give readers especially researchers a better understanding of the design and detail craftsmanship pertaining to such art forms. YTM Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, believed that the artifacts featured in this book, were produced not by craftsman but by artists who were expressing not just their artistic vision, but also the cultural vision of a developed civilization.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on Malay architecture and mosque architecture. An examination of some of these studies has provided this research with a better understanding and historical view of the formative processes underlying Malay architecture, especially the period which witnessed the transformation and revolution in one of the most helpful books in this context is "*Mosque Architecture in the Malay World*", by Abdul Halim Nasir, (2004). The historical aspect and the examples of mosques in this book, served as a useful reference guide. This book describes the first mosques in the world, the coming of Islam to Malaysia and the first mosque that was built in this country. Then this book proceeded to examine many Malaysian mosques from their architectural aspects, while providing details and illustrations about the map, plan and facades of such mosques.

Ghafar Ahmad, (1999) has also written a useful article entitled "*The Architectural Styles of Mosques in Malaysia: From Vernacular to Modern Structures*". This article also like the book Abdul H. Nasir's book mentioned earlier,

describes the coming of Islam, and the shift to Malaysian architecture and the influence of the British colonial period, especially in terms of the emergence of a hybrid style. Mosque architecture in Malaysia can be classified into vernacular, colonial, and modern forms. Ghafar Ahmad, has done a comparative study by conducting a survey of selected mosques in Malaysia, emphasizing the use of materials, the scale of building the elements and facilities involved in such mosques.

From a different point of view, there is a research done by Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, with the title of "*Mosque Architecture in Malaysia: Classification of Styles and Possible Influence*". This article starts with a discussion of the concept of mosque and style in architecture, history and function of a mosque. Then it shifts its focus, to categorize Malaysian mosques and different architecture styles. This research has identified seven distinct styles: Traditional vernacular, Sino-eclectic, European Classic, North Indian, Modern, Modernistic, and Post- Modern style. The main concern of Mohamad Tajuddin's paper is to elucidate clearly the different architectural styles of Muslim architecture.

In terms of case study, Masjid Wilayah, one of the useful references for this researcher is a book, edited by Ajmal M Razak (2001) with the title of "*Masjid Wilayah Perhersekutuan*". It covers the subject areas such as the design concept of the mosque, different parts of the building, its plan, its details, the challenges faced in building it, and also the different styles that are used in building this mosque. Since there is no other comprehensive book about this mosque, this book has served as an authoritative reference for those who have written articles and produced research about the Wilayah Mosque.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ECLECTICISM

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Oxford Dictionary eclecticism has come to mean a “Term in criticism for a person or style which conflates features borrowed from various sources. Such a style often arises from the overt or tacit doctrine that the excellences of great masters can be selected and combined in one work of art.”<sup>2</sup>

Eclecticism will be explained in this chapter as it is in different fields and focus on eclecticism in art and architecture which is the main discussion of this study. As example of eclecticism, in this chapter eclectic architecture is explored in some countries like Turkey, Egypt and America.

#### 2.2 ECLECTICISM IN DIFFERENT FIELDS

The concept of eclecticism is applied in several fields such as philosophy, psychology, art, and architecture which will be mention here as the examples:

“A term used specially in philosophy and theology for a composite system of thought made up of views borrowed from various other systems. Where the characteristic doctrines of a philosophy are not thus merely adopted, but are the modified products of a blending if the system from which it takes its rise, the philosophy is not properly eclectic. Eclecticism always tends to spring up after a period of vigorous constructive speculation, especially in the later stages of a controversy between thinkers of pre-eminent ability.”<sup>3</sup>

In the field of philosophy which eclecticism originated from that, the first sparks of eclecticism came to be known in writings of Victor Cousin (1792-1867) in

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<sup>2</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of Art, “eclectic, eclecticism”, p.162.

<sup>3</sup> The Encyclopedia Britannica,(1985), Vol.7,“Eclecticism”, p.887.

1830<sup>4</sup>. He was against the idea of searching for a new idea continuously; instead, he expressed his eagerness more for selecting precisely from other existing doctrines, combined them again and presented it in a new doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

“In Rome philosophy, eclecticism never became more than a secondary pursuit; naturally, therefore, the roman thinkers were for the most part eclectic. Of this tendency Cicero is the most striking illustration- his philosophical works consisting of an aggregation, with little or no blending, of doctrine borrowed from Stoicism, Peri-pateticism, and the skepticism of the Middle Academy.”<sup>6</sup>

“In the last stage of Greek philosophy the eclectic spirit produced remarkable results outside the philosophies of those properly called eclectics. Thinkers chose their doctrines from many sources-from the venerated teaching of Aristotle and Plato, from that of the Pythagoreans and of the Stoics, from the old Greek mythology, and from the Jewish and other Oriental system.”<sup>7</sup>

By some means different from eclecticism in architecture, eclecticism in interior design means to design a place based just on your personal taste; a design beyond the mores and conventions, and being prepared to challenge traditional expectations and taking efforts to combine the traditional and modern elements in one single work.<sup>8</sup>

Eclecticism in interior design appeared by early twentieth century in the 1990s, modern eclecticism came to exist as a reaction to minimalism. The white and plain walls turned to surfaces with colors and textures. Modern eclecticism prepared a suitable ground for having diversities, personal design and expression, and going beyond the boundaries of culture, tradition and country. It is open to individual

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<sup>4</sup> J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style*, (London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 164.

<sup>5</sup> The dictionary of Art, Vol. 9, “Eclecticism”, p.704.

<sup>6</sup> The Encyclopedia Britannica, (1985), Vol.7, p.887.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Lara Maiklem, *modern eclectic*, (Bitain: Mitchell Beazley, 2001).