

FAITH THROUGH THE LENS OF FORMS:
A STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS
ARCHITECTURE OF SINGAPORE IN FOSTERING
INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING

BY

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ABSTRACT

The inception of the colonial past led to an impetus to the growth of Singapore to be home to a highly heterogeneous population that had travelled from across the seas. Since their arrivals, the small island had transformed into a dynamic and remarkably unique island, exemplary of a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious society where the community live harmoniously together. Bridging the differences across cultures and religious beliefs while fostering a healthy and flourishing plural society that embraced peaceful co-existence had never been an easy task for everyone. The spectrum of challenges that spawned from a multitude of differences could be daunting and equally monumental. It required not only an excellent foresight from the pioneering populace, but also an abundance of dedication, diligence, empathy, and sensitivities. It was undoubtedly the result of a sound education supported by the inculcation of shared values and attitudes within a common space that Singaporeans came to have the confidence, trust, and mutual respect for one another in order to co-exist in the same environment. Given the existing backdrop, the topic had been carefully studied with the intent to position religious architectural forms, as a beacon and a tool to support the understanding of the religious faiths. With a hybrid research methodology, it attempted to articulate the manifestations of the architecture of faiths and documenting the understanding and observations of the community in relation to the message of the religion and the religious architecture. Subsequently, it explored the effectiveness of the architectural forms, as a significant source of knowledge in understanding the respective religious faiths. With the knowledge harnessed and harvested, the outcome of the study sought to uncover the role religious architecture plays and can play in fostering interfaith understanding and cultivating mutual respect among the racial communities. Notwithstanding the abundance of research studies on this subject matter, many of the prior research studies seemed to be very limited in scope, focusing more on the visual and aesthetic appearance of the architecture itself without positioning the forms of religious architecture as a source of knowledge on the religious faiths. There were many narratives dedicated to religious architectures and these may and often do, serve as a ground for further analysis of the relationship between faith and various aspects of what constitutes architecture. What followed from this exercise was certainly not a completed account of the ways how knowledge could be derived from the architectural forms to forge and facilitate understanding, but rather a platform that others can build on and around to spring-board further research.

خلاصة البحث

لقد أدت بداية الماضي الاستعماري إلى دفع عجلة نمو سنغافورة لتصبح موطنًا لسكان غير متجانسين للغاية سافروا عبر البحار. منذ وصولهم، تحولت الجزيرة الصغيرة إلى جزيرة ديناميكية وفريدة من نوعها بشكل ملحوظ، وهي نموذج لمجتمع متعدد الأعراق واللغات والأديان حيث يعيش المجتمع في وئام معًا. لم يكن تجسير الاختلافات عبر الثقافات والمعتقدات الدينية مع تعزيز مجتمع تعددي صحي ومزدهر يتبنى التعايش السلمي مهمة سهلة للجميع. إن مجموعة التحديات التي نتجت عن العديد من الاختلافات قد تكون شاقة وهائلة بنفس القدر. ولم يتطلب الأمر بعد نظرًا ممتازًا من الجماهير الرواد فحسب، بل تطلب أيضًا وفرة من التفاني والاجتهاد والتعاطف والحساسيات. لقد كان بلا شك نتيجة تعليم سليم مدعومًا بغرس القيم والمواقف المشتركة داخل مساحة مشتركة، حيث أصبح السنغافوريون يتمتعون بالثقة والثقة والاحترام المتبادل لبعضهم البعض من أجل التعايش في نفس البيئة. بالنظر إلى الخلفية الحالية، تمت دراسة الموضوع بعناية بقصد وضع الأشكال المعمارية الدينية كمنارة وأداة لدعم فهم المعتقدات الدينية. ومن خلال منهجية بحثية هجينة، حاولت صياغة مظاهر عمارة الأديان وتوثيق فهم وملاحظات المجتمع فيما يتعلق برسالة الدين والعمارة الدينية. بعد ذلك، استكشف فعالية الأشكال المعمارية، كمصدر مهم للمعرفة في فهم المعتقدات الدينية المعنية. مع المعرفة التي تم تسخيرها وحصادها، سعت نتيجة الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الدور الذي تلعبه العمارة الدينية ويمكن أن تلعبه في تعزيز التفاهم بين الأديان وزراعة الاحترام المتبادل بين المجتمعات العرقية. على الرغم من وفرة الدراسات البحثية حول هذا الموضوع، بدا أن العديد من الدراسات البحثية السابقة كانت محدودة النطاق للغاية، مع التركيز بشكل أكبر على المظهر المرئي والجمالي للعمارة نفسها دون وضع أشكال العمارة الدينية كمصدر للمعرفة حول المعتقدات الدينية. كانت هناك العديد من الروايات المكرسة للهندسة المعمارية الدينية، وقد تكون هذه الروايات، وغالبًا ما تفعل ذلك، بمثابة أساس لمزيد من التحليل للعلاقة بين الإيمان والجوانب المختلفة لما يشكل العمارة. ما أعقب هذا التمرين لم يكن بالتأكيد سرًا كاملاً للطرق التي يمكن من خلالها اشتقاق المعرفة من الأشكال المعمارية لتكوين وتسهيل الفهم، بل بالأحرى منصة يمكن للآخرين البناء عليها ومن أجل بدء المزيد من البحث.

ABSTRAK

Zaman penjajahan mencetus pertumbuhan Singapura sebagai tempat bermaustautin para penduduk yang majmuk yang datang dari merata benua. Ramai yang mengembara dari rantau Asia yang berhampiran. Semenjak kedatangan mereka, kepulauan kecil Singapura telah berubah menjadi sebuah pulau yang dinamik dan berkelbagaian. Ia menjadi contoh masyarakat berbilang kaum, bahasa dan 'agama di mana masyarakat hidup harmoni bersama. Merapatkan jurang perbezaan antara budaya dan memupuk masyarakat majmuk yang sihat dan berkembang yang berteraskan kedamaian bukanlah tugas yang mudah. Ia penuh dengan cabaran yang bukan hanya memerlukan pandangan jauh dari warga perintis, tetapi juga dedikasi, kerja keras dan sensitiviti yang mendalam yang terbit dari wujudnya banyak perbezaan. Untuk memupukkan nilai dan sikap sepadu dalam ruangan umum, warga Singapura perlu saling menghormati antara satu sama lain untuk wujud bersama dalam persekitaran yang sama. Memandangkan latar belakang yang sedia ada, topik yang dipilih telah dikaji dan disaring dengan terperinci dan dipilih dengan tujuan untuk menggunakan senibina, iaitu, bentuk senibina keagamaan, sebagai wadah dan alat untuk menyokong pemahaman keagamaan dari pelbagai kaum. Ia bermula dengan usaha untuk mengartikulasikan senibina yang berbeza dari pelbagai agama, mendokumentasikan pemahaman dan pengalaman masyarakat kaum yang berkaitan dengan mesej agama dan senibina agama. Seterusnya, ia menerokai keberkesanan bentuk senibina, sebagai sumber pengetahuan yang penting dalam memahami kepercayaan agama tertentu. Dengan pengetahuan yang dimanfaatkan dan didapati, hasil kajian menjurus kepada mendedahkan peranan senibina agama yang dapat dimainkan dalam memupuk pemahaman antara agama dan menanamkan rasa saling menghormati di kalangan masyarakat majmuk. Walaupun terdapat banyak kajian penyelidikan mengenai topik ini, banyak kajian penyelidikan terdahulu amat terhad dalam skop dan memberi tumpuan lebih kepada penampilan visual dan estetik senibina itu sendiri tanpa memposisikan bentuk senibina keagamaan. Kajian ini pastinya bukanlah satu yang muktamad tentang cara pengetahuan dapat diperoleh dari bentuk- bentuk senibina, tetapi satu papan pemangkin bagi hala-tuju penyelidikan selanjutnya.

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 thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Islamic Thought and Civilisation (Research).

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Associate Prof. Dr. Spahic Omer
Supervisor

I certify that I have 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 thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Islamic Thought and Civilisation (Research).

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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.

Nor Ainah Binte Mohamed Ali



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21 January 2022

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

All Praise belongs to Allah (SWT), the Almighty, the One without Whose Guidance this thesis would not have been possible. The One who journeyed me to destinations, left alone I would never find. The One who guided me to the bearers and inheritors of 'ilm, left alone, I would never meet. Blessings and peace upon our beloved Prophet Muḥammad (SAW), his family and his Companions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SWT	Glory to Him, the Exalted
SAW	Peace be upon him
AS	May Allah be pleased with him
DIKW	Data, Information, Knowledge, Wisdom
KM	Knowledge Management
IKM	Islamic Knowledge Management
BTRTM	Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum
ATMT	Awareness through Mosque Tour
HDG	Harmony in Diversity Gallery