The Distinctiveness of Plant Characteristic in Reinforcing the Place Identity for Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak

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Abstract. Plants are a valuable indicator for aesthetic-visual probity in order to manifest the type and degree of the human-nature relationship over time. The study aims to identify the distinctiveness of plant characteristics in order to reinforce townscape elements in establishing the place identity for the case study of the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The study methodology involved a semi-structured interview, with purposive sampling in three categories, which is professionals, policymaker, and skilled practitioner. The results show that there is a significance between the royal plants and the distinctiveness of traditional plants which are intended to be the townscape element's identity of the royal town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The findings of the study are expected to assist the city council in their town planning by proposing the plants' character images or the identity of the royal town of Kuala Kangsar. Besides, the findings could apply a guideline for future developments in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak.

1. Introduction

Malaysia is among the countries facing the obstacles of the public sameness of place as the modern world has produced excessive architectural and commercial uniformity among many cities in designing for a place identity [1]. The situation same goes for the Royal Town, Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia, which almost eroded by the uncontrolled urban development and modernity. The dullness and conformity have caused the differing identities, characteristics, significance, and emotional associations in the physical elements [2,3]. Moreover, the identity and characteristic of Malay Royal towns is still unclear and threatened by tremendous changes due to rapid industrialization, economic development, and urbanization [4]. Consequently, it is affecting imperative elements such as the town identity, sense of place and physical element of the Malay Royal Town [5]. As a result, the global tourism industry needs for better place branding to develop a unique and distinctive identity in order to design a contemporary place identity [1]. Therefore, this paper is to identify the distinctiveness plants characteristic for reinforcing place identity in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar.
2. Background

The growth of urbanization and rapid globalization are known as a significant cause that hit the place identity of the Royal Towns around the world. These are including: 1) Royal Town Sutton Coldfield in the United Kingdom [6]; 2) Shenyang Imperial Palace in Beijing imperial deteriorated by the undergoes massive urban environment transformation [7]; 3) Royal Palace of Angkor Thom in Cambodia faded due to the fluctuations of a tropical climate have primarily erased the residences, as well as; 4) Bayon Temple, ruined after the construction of the royal capital [8,9]; and 5) Petropolis Imperial City in Brazil which undergone changes in order to adapt the new uses, growth, and structures [10].

In Malaysia, there are several royal towns such as Bandar Maharani (Muar), Kota Bharu (Royal Seat), Kuala Terengganu (Royal States), Negeri Sembilan (Seri Menanti), Selangor (Klang), Perlis (Arau), Kedah (Anak Bukit), Pahang (Pekan) and especially Perak (Royal Town Kuala Kangsar). According to Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council (MPKK), the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar almost battered by the uncontrolled urban development and modernity [5]. While based on direct observation, it is due to the lack of uniformity development, no continuity of streetscapes from the main road to the town and entrance to Iskandariah Palace of Royal Town. Previous research also found that the uniqueness of royal tourism of Kuala Kangsar is essential as it visualized and portrayed the value of the royal cultural heritage and the existent the monetary institutions [11]. However, over the years there has not been much tourism development in Kuala Kangsar because of the limitation of space and elimination of the boundaries in order to keep Royal Town Kuala Kangsar as a tourist attraction [12].

2.1 Place Identity

A study about place interprets the relationship between the environmental character and people’s perceptions about cultural and physical settings. Identity is known as a landmark and critical element in shaping an identity for a place [13]. Growing research has shown that place identity emphasized the emotional bonding with places is not new [14,15]. Prior studies stated the emotional bonding as place rootedness [16], sense of place [17], place dependence [18], place bonding [19], and place attachment [20]. Place identity in this context of the study refers as the meaning and values place features to one’s identity. In other words, it used to portray an individual feeling of identification of community living based on the physical, emotional and behavioral characteristic in Royal Town Kuala Kangsar [14,21]. Therefore, the place identity of Kuala Kangsar stance through the visual elements which symbolized the cultural association of the community that portrayed the unity of the Royal Town character. The characters are including the distinctiveness, continuity, recognition, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and aesthetic are five characters that visualized through the distinctiveness of the plants.

2.1.1 The Distinctiveness of Indigenous Plant. The plants are valuable indicators contributing to aesthetic-visual quality, which record the human-nature relationship over time [22,23]. The types of the plants growing in the Malay village have specific functions in the Malay way of life in daily life used such as edibles, medicines, furniture, and others [22,24]. Moreover, previous research has linked the garden element with the distinctiveness of plant in Malay culture. Kaboudarahangi, et al. [25], stated that among the garden elements, water, plant, and architectural features have the most influence on preferences. Kendal et al. [26], suggest that plants linked with people through their aesthetic styles, form and characters such as the shape of flower leaf, and foliage. However, plants of uncertain origin can be a landscape icon based on the uniqueness of the flowers and the plants’ physical characters [27]. The types of plants categorized into herbs and ‘ulam’ in the traditional Malay landscape. They are including: Cekur (Kaempferia galanga), Pegaga (Centella asiatica) Mengkudu (Morinda citrifolia), Coconut (Cocos nucifera), Ulam Raja (Cosmos caudatus), Selom (Oenanthe javanica), Kaduk (Piper sarmentosum), Lime (× Citrofortunella microcarpa), Kunyit (Curcuma longa), Cengkhih (Syzygium aromaticum), Kemunting Cina (Catharanthus roseus) and Misai Kucing (Orthosiphon aristatus). On the other hand, Jackfruit (Artocarpus heterophyllus), Sugarcane (Sacharum officinarum), Banana (Musa acuminate), Langsat (Lansium domesticum) and Mangosteen (Garcinia mangostana) have particular
character recognized as unique among the traditional plants. This type of fruit plants symbolized the Malay culture and local belief [28].

3. Methodology

3.1 Site Study
Kuala Kangsar is selected for this study because it is a convenient location; it holds a unique heritage of the Perak Malay Sultanate and contains much historic building associated with the royal legacy heritage. Furthermore, the town has officially declared as the Perak Royal City since 1887 [29]. The Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar is located in the State of Perak and situated in the north of Peninsular Malaysia between Ipoh and Taiping. The town today is bypassed by the North-South Highway and has become a backwater of tourism. It is 35km north of Ipoh, the State Capital, and situated on the western bank of the Perak River. From Ipoh, the highway passes through karst topography dominated by rounded limestone hills blanketed in unique vegetation that can survive the harsh conditions.

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1.** (a) Perak map; (b) Map of Royal Town, Kuala Kangsar, Perak

3.2 Respondents and Semi-Structured Interview
The respondents were twelve local peoples resided in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, which categorized into three consisted of: four professional, two policymakers and four skilled practitioners. This study used a qualitative case study that included observation, documentation, and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, in order to streamline the discussion, first, the respondents were asked to write down their data as part of the respondents’ characteristics. Then proceeded to give their responses to the several discussions topics prepared previously. The data obtained from these twelve respondents are categorized into the following topics (Table 1.).
Table 1. Topics and Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

| Topic | Research questions |
|-------|--------------------|
| **The distinctiveness of plants enhance place identity** | i) Can you list the name of plant that you familiar seen here? |
| | ii) Where did you see the plants? |
| | iii) Can you explain why the plants have been chosen? |
| | iv) Is it the plants have strong connected with Kuala Kangsar? Why did you say that? |
| | v) Did you think that plants have any speciality? Which part of plant? |

Later, the researcher analysed the written connection of the plants with the place at the end of the interviewed recorded. The essential parts highlighted, and the objective was to select phrases containing hidden ideas that would support the research and compile them.

4. Result

4.1 City Morphology Component to Identity the Specific Identity

The criteria of the plant will visualize the city morphology components as well as the royal town appearance through the type of plant that related to local people and culture of a place. Therefore, the choice of a specific plant gradually creates the formation of identity. Thereby, the interaction among the components of the environmental setting with the distinctiveness of plant will define the royal town faces, including streets, squares, and other public spaces.

4.2 The Distinctiveness of the Plant

The respondents answer for the following questions regarding other criteria the plants can represent in the royal town. Under the distinctiveness of plants category, there have seven criteria of plants listed. Figure 1 displays the distinctiveness of plant criteria for the royal town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The figure above illustrates the proportion of the different type of distinctiveness plant. From this data, Spider Lily achieved the highest percentage (39%) than Bunga Kalumpang (21%), followed by Bunga Raya (15%), Kerak Nasi (14%), Paddy Flower (7%) and Daun Labu (4%).

![Figure 2. Distinctiveness of plant criteria for Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak.](image)

The comment below illustrate about the plant relate with place;

“The Almarhum Sultan love Spider Lily....It because brings back the nostalgia of the village environment.” (PR5).
The respondent SP4 reported Kalumpang flower and Spider Lily embellish on the palace “They choose Kalumpang flower and Spider Lily as a pattern adorn at the interior of the palace.” (SP4).

Respondent SP5 agreed that the shape of the flower is the criteria to identify the type of plant suitable in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar. This type of plant under the local plant category. The plant mirror the magnificent images for the royal such as “daun Labu”. As state of the participant as below; “The design for royalty, like the plant with a big shape of the flower. The big shape represents the richness and high rank of the royal sultanate institution. That is why I choose the type of flower as the decoration on the royal throne.” (SP5)

Bunga Raya or National Plants is one of the favourite flowers has been chosen by craft maker as a subject matter. The flower with five petals makes the craft maker easy to transform into the pattern. Thus, people familiar with Bunga Raya with the history behind the development of Malaysia. As states by SP1 below; “As you can see here, Bunga Raya quite popular here wheater as a planting around the town, also as a pattern applied onto Labu Sayong...” (SP1)

The type of plant has a beautiful flower and scented have been chosen to embellish the Malay traditional village it remains as decorative plants "Pokok Kesidang, some people called Kerak Nasi...the flower smell like "pandan", old people love to plant on their garden" (PR1)

The most important plants and have connected with Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar is Paddy Flower. This type of plants has meaning behind where it used as symbols of Perak Jata and Sultan Jata. "Paddy Flower is a must...that's symbolize..the luxury or sustenance, it also has on the “Jata Tuanku”” (SP3)

In summary, the unique character of the Spider Lily (Hymenocallis caribaea), Bunga Kalumpang (Sterculia parviflora), Bunga Raya (Hibiscus rosa-sinensis), Kerak Nasi (Vallaris glabra), Paddy Flower (Oryza sativa) and Daun labu (Cucurbita moschata) visualized through the form of the plants presented on the element of the town. By the same token, it symbolized the Malay tradition rooted on the Kuala Kangsar, Perak as well as an icon of the culture for Malay community.

![Figure 3](image_url)

**Figure 3.** (a) Kalumpang Flower (*Sterculia parviflora*); (b) Spider Lily (*Hymenocallis caribaea*)
Figure 4. Daun Labu (*Cucurbita moschata*); (b) Kerak Nasi Flower (*Vallaris glabra*)

Figure 5. (a) Paddy Flower (*Oryza sativa*); (b) Bunga Raya (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*)

5. Discussion

5.1 The Distinctiveness of Indigenous Plant

The distinctiveness plants are the second aspect of the plant's factor. The results confirmed the themes proposed for the distinctiveness of plants character as below; the specialty of plants character, give an effect to the place. Also, the participant points out that the listed of plants recognized have the uniqueness to shape the identity, as; i) Spider Lily (*Hymenocallis caribaea*), ii) Kalumpang (*Sterculia parviflora*), iii) Kerak Nasi (*Vallaris glabra*), iv) Bunga Raya (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*). Table 2 shown that the selected plants are known as distinctive plant based on the historical background for the sense of traditional medicinal value, the aesthetic value of the form flower for the local community as well as symbolizes the favorite Royal aesthetic value. While others opinion of the participants agreed that the listed of these flowers represented the distinctiveness of plants that could shape the identity of a place. The plants listed under the category of a traditional plant. The value of the plants establish from the traditional people used the natural element in their daily life routine. As states by Yuen [30], that the values of place identity can provide an exceptional experience such as nostalgia and memory and the ability to recognize the place in order to keep the historical importance for Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The heritage mean features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings.
Table 2. Summary of Distinctiveness of Indigenous Plant

| The Distinctiveness of Plant Criteria for Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar | The Distinctiveness of Indigenous Plant |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Spider Lily (traditional medicinal value), Bunga Kalumpang (local aesthetic value), Bunga Raya (historical background), Kerak Nasi (Royal aesthetic value), Paddy Flower (local aesthetic value), Daun Labu (local aesthetic value). | Paddy Flower (local aesthetic value), Tanjong, Cengkhih, Sireh, Buluh, Pucuk Rebung, Melur, Paku Pakis, Belai Gajah, Asam Batu, Daun Labu and Ros (traditional plant) |

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the color of the plants gives the harmonious effect of the place. The traditional plants may use as an iconic landscape, through highlighted the uniqueness of flora and the real character the plants equally essential to bring back the nostalgia of the traditional village garden. Also, the plants grow near the landmarks buildings influence an initial sign of imageability of place. Thus, the location of the plants at the focal point of the town catches the eyesight of people. The type of plants-related with historical background of the royal institution of Perak such as Spider Lily (*Hymenocallis caribaea*), ii) Kalumpang (*Sterculia parviflora*), iii) Kerak Nasi (*Vallaris glabra*), iv) Bunga Raya (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), v) Paddy Flower (*Oryza sativa*) and vi) Daun Labu (*Cucurbita moschata*) highlight the identity of the royal town. Indirectly, the landmarks become the most favorable and attractive element due to the distinct characteristic. Hence, it is imperative to sustain the plants' motifs and image by re-introducing through planting design in order to highlight the distinctiveness character to reinforcing the place identity of the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar.

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