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Cultural Heritage Tourism: Kapitan Keling mosque as a focal point & symbolic identity for Indian muslim in Penang

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Abstract

This study has identified a cultural heritage product of the Indian Muslim community that has contributed significantly to the tourism industry in Penang, namely Kapitan Keling Mosque. The study also shows that the Kapitan Keling Mosque highlights the strength of ethnic identity and sustainability of the India Muslim heritage especially for the purpose of 'tourist gaze'. This research is an ethnographic research, using qualitative methods. The results showed that the cultural heritage of Indian Muslim community has become a product of 'tourist gaze' and has confirmed that; the Kapitan Keling Mosque is now the main symbol and focal center in the improvement of the social and life force of the community in Georgetown.

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Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism; Kapitan Keling mosque; Indian muslim; tourist gaze

1. Introduction

The two historical cities in Malaysia, namely Penang and Malacca, are inscribed as UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Sites in Malaysia (Ismail, 2012). In conjunction with the recognition, this study is focused on the well-known capital of Penang, called Georgetown.

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Previously, George Town was a trading port that had brought a large number of traders from the northern region of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, India, China, and Arab. This phenomenon had created a multicultural dimension that unites the people from various cultural backgrounds. Inter-marriage between immigrants and local people had resulted in a cultural hybrid (i.e., Jawi Peranakan, Baba Nyonya, and Indian Muslims) which reflect the lifestyle of local people (Shamsuddin, Sulaiman & Amat, 2012). Indian Muslim community is the largest community that migrated to Penang, had taken its root and had grown in Penang since Sir Francis Light controlled Penang in 1786 (Nagata, 2012). Most of the Indian Muslim community in the city of Georgetown was originally merchants, traders, and labourers. In a 2010 census by the statistics department in Malaysia, showed that the Indian Muslim's population has reached 78,702, from the total of 1,907,827 Indians in Malaysia. Meanwhile, the Indian Muslim population in Penang has reached 12,335 people, with a record of the second highest after the state of Selangor (Wan, 2012).

The Kapitan Keling Mosque is one of the hallmarks that play a role in the economic development, social and education for the Indian Muslim community in Penang. The Indian Muslim community at that time was rich and influential. Their position and wealth of the India Muslim individual causes many of them intermarried with the majority society in Malaysia, namely the Malays (Nagata, 2012). In fact, sometimes there is an ethnic identity conflict between the Indian Muslim community and Jawi Peranakan community themselves. If an Indian Muslim had mixed with the dominant Malay community through a marriage, he is known as a Jawi Peranakan. Due to this phenomenon, the Indian Muslim community in Penang through the India Muslim Community Association of Malaysia (IMCOM) organized the cultural heritage of India Muslim festival where various programs are presented, which include the Indian Muslim traditional costume, food, traditional games and mini-museums. These programs resulted in the formation of their culture and community. In addition, the efforts undertaken by the community are all based in Kapitan Keling Mosque. The Kapitan Keling Mosque has become a landmark for the surrounding communities and is now beginning to be known among the tourists. Hussain & Bet (2014) stated that the identification of a landmark is the recognition of its attributes and characteristics that influence an individual's thoughts. Landmarks may influence visitors' imagination and memory of the city. Each landmark portrays either one or more of the attributes that include proportion and size, colors, uniqueness, location or strategic position, point of reference, symbolism and architectural values.

Overall, these processes have caused some issues. Several questions are highlighted here, how ethnic identity has been integrated with the process to be performed and attract tourists to participate? Then, to provide the importance of Kapitan Keling Mosque in enhancing community development, thus produce the quality of life of the surrounding community. This study also examine on how ethnic identity is 'presented' to tourists and how the Indian Muslim community uses 'tourism' as a medium for them to present their cultural heritage, which aims not only to introduce their culture to tourists but has a stronger objective, 'to ensure that the Indian Muslim cultural heritage can be preserved and be proud by the younger generation'. This further reinforces that their perceived ethnic identity may be suffering from 'fading away' if awareness on their ethnic heritage is not emphasized. The involvements of India Muslim community not only affect the quality of life, but also strengthen their community identity.

1.1. Kapitan Keling Mosque

Kapitan Keling Mosque is located in the World Heritage Site, UNESCO, which became a universal valuable. The UNESCO World Heritage Sites is a site that includes natural features (forest, mountains, etc.) and man-made elements (monuments, buildings, cities, etc.). The values of the site must be universal and outstanding (Shamsuddin, et al., 2012). Kapitan Keling Mosque is the meeting point for the community to perform acts of worship equally and also the place for society to socialize and mingle with local people nearby. The concept of Moghul architecture of this mosque had been said looks like the Taj Mahal in India. Become the focus of local people, this mosque is also known as the Indian Muslim community mosque. Kapitan Keling Mosque was initially developed by a committee headed by Captain Kader Mohideen in 1802 and at one time has become the Penang State Mosque one time. However, although Kapitan Keling Mosque was no longer a state mosque, the design and architecture are still preserved as a cultural heritage and tourist gaze as cited by Hewison (1987) in the Urry

(1990) literature states, "if we are really interested in our history itself, we must conserve to keep the value and become the different".

History tells, Cander Mohuddeen (also referred to as Kaidir Maidin) or Cauder Mydin Merican and better known as Kapitan Keling has implemented his dream and have given an idea to the British administration to build mosques. The Kapitan Keling Mosque is a very important symbol of the Penang Indian Muslim community. Feeling of pride as a community towards the mosque can be seen from the statement given by the Kapitan Keling Mosque chairman through in-depth interviews, "people are now ready to receive visitors and make the mosque as not only a place of worship but also lead to disseminate information through tourism platform. The community also opens to share the history and uniqueness that are available in this Kapitan Keling Mosque. Various forms of program involving the community, the public and tourists are based in this mosque.

1.2. The Indian Muslim Community

Indian Muslim community has settled in the country since 1780 during the time of the Malacca Sultanate (Omar, 2005). Initially, their arrival in Malaya is for business purposes and spread the teachings of Islam (Nin, 1993). Indian Muslim community also plays a role in developing the Malayan economy through business areas such as restaurant, jewelry, textiles, travel agencies, retail businesses and others. Indian Muslim communities living in Malaysia enable these groups to recognize the culture and manners of the local community. They also help build mosques and madrassas across the country and also develop the religion.

Indian Muslim community is a minority group as compared to the group of Indians and Malays the largest ethnic group in the country. Now the generation of Indian Muslim community is growing in this country (Mohd, 2009). However, the people of Indian Muslim face conflict identity through mix cultural ethnic. According to Stark (2006), there are among them identified as Indians, and some are said to be Malay. Indian Muslim community has experienced a conflict in society (Stark, 2006). Although the Indian Muslim community is dealing with the mixing of cultures and identities in ethnic conflict, issues that form should not be a barrier to accentuate all of the attraction and uniqueness of these people. Through the origin of the cultural diversity, indirectly has established various cultural and historical that may be used as a commodity product for the country.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cultural heritage tourism

According to Christou (2005), there is a great discussion (and in some cases the difference of opinion) among researchers trying to distinguish between cultural tourism and heritage tourism. The term 'cultural tourism' which is used interchangeably with 'heritage tourism' or 'ethnic tourism' usually offers tourists the attraction of cultural traditions, places and values such as religious practice, folklore traditions and social custom of certain communities or ethnic. Cultural tourism involves four elements that are tourism use of cultural heritage assets, consumption of experiences and products, and tourist (Rodzi, Zaki & Subli, 2013). Cultural tourism involves the traveler to learn about the history of a place and the foreign community heritage or way of life. Other than that, an involvement of any activity, or something that can offer an infinite experience (Zakaria, Salleh & Rashid 2014). Christou (2005) and Csapo (2012) argues that heritage tourism can provide a scan or a past nostalgic and reality. Along with the cultural and natural source region, a World Heritage Site is a major tourist attraction and forms the backbone of the tourism industry. Even inscriptions from the world heritage site quickly show a place that is listed as a major tourist attraction (Endresen, 1999).

2.2. Ethnic identity, tourism and Indian muslim community involvement

Ethnic identity is often cited as one of the main tools for developing tourism and cultural heritage (Picard & Wood, 1997). Stronza (2001) through the study of members of other scholars has found that tourism as a "function to strengthen ethnic identity". Tourism "can help indigenous people defend their identity", can lead to "the revival

of indigenous culture or ethnic recreation", became a vehicle to present the image and make changes in development from time to time. Tourism related to ethnic involves the way in which visitors interact with residents through visits to their homes, observing the daily routine and participate in the ceremony held (Cohen, 1984).

Tajfel (1981) explains; ethnic identity refers to the social component of ethnic identity. It refers to an individual's self-concept of the knowledge they acquired during the process of becoming a member of a social group associated with the value and emotional relationship with these social groups. Ethnic identity is very important in ensuring self-concept and psychological functions among members of these ethnic groups. For those who inherit India Muslim culture, it is important to them to maintain this heritage and the process of educating young people about their ancestry culture and quality of life.

2.3. The tourist gaze concept

The mosque is a place of worship and to conduct multipurpose activities for Muslim (Baharudin & Ismail, 2014). Activities conducted at Kapitan Keling Mosque became the focus of the existence of community and tourists. Kahn (1997) in his study of the tourist gaze in Georgetown area clearly involves the view of the landscape and urban environment that are common to the tourist experience. Kahn emphasized that, "no other place" like Georgetown that can be seen by tourists in terms of culture and food with cultural diversity (Malay, Chinese and Indian), lively nightlife along the way, the rich history of the various buildings and vary colors.

In the context of Sharpley & Sundaram (2005), the concept of the tourist gaze refers to a situation in which tourists or visitors using the power of the way they see the local people and expect them to look and behave. Residents also agreed to become gaze in hopes of serving tourists. Long-term implications are residents will defend or at least act, highlighting the tradition to satisfy and attract more tourists. The locals are consciously attempting to adjust the expected visitors from the aspect of authenticity, although contrived or fake.

3. Methodology

The research is drawn from the field of anthropology. Abdel-Hadi (2012) believes that, 'cultural anthropologists' focus on the ways people express their view of themselves and their world in symbolic forms and also the cultural frameworks that impact local cultural frameworks that live in reality. This ethnographic research method collects the data through fieldwork observation and in-depth interview method. Fieldwork study involves researchers to experience and observe the activities of the society such as rituals, social behavior and the cultural practices closely. In addition, to see the activities they perform and interviewing those involved, obtaining information through their experience. This research was carried out in Penang and study visits focused on the famous tourist destinations in the world; Georgetown, as a World Heritage City. In addition, the research samples were obtained through snowball technique. The informants for this research are individuals from the Indian Muslim community, members of the IMCOM, officers and volunteers, domestic tourists and international tourists. The overall numbers of informants are 40 people. Constraints faced when collecting data is to differentiate between a real Indian Muslim and the 'Jawi Peranakan' for they seem to look alike.

4. Findings

4.1. Stage identity, cultural and heritage of Indian muslim community



Fig. 1. (a) Fiesta Classic Bicycle; (b) Participants with Fancy Costumes

Efforts undertaken by the Indian Muslim community to develop their cultural heritage is through involving in tourism activities. Tourism activity involves 'staging' history and culture of India Muslim products to show to the tourists. The effort can be seen in terms of program and festival celebrations staged for tourists and produce as tourism commodities. Endresen (1999) examine the role of festivals and events as an important dimension of cultural heritage tourism. Festivals and events are often associated with/or implemented in areas with cultural heritage that has significance in terms of the local culture and natural environment.

Such a program could play an important role in helping to maintain cultural traditions and values while providing communities with the ability to create jobs and income. Among the successful programs are, the India Muslim Cultural Celebration, Mini Museum, Amazing Race Sports Program in Georgetown, Bicycle Classic Fiesta, Traditional Game (i.e., Let's Do *Poomaalai*), IM.TV, India Muslim Youth Heritage Trail, Indian Muslim Story Telling and various community development programs as well as to introduce and promote more of the cultural heritage of Indian Muslim community. Most of the programs are organized by IMCOM, and they involved the participations from all races in Malaysia as well as participant from all over the country.



Fig. 2. (a) India Muslim Story Telling Program; (b) Heritage Trail Program Participants

4.2. Kapitan Keling Mosque as World Heritage Site: 'Indian Muslim Cultural & Heritage Day'



Fig. 3. (a) A Traditional Game, *Palangulli (Congkak)*; (b) A nostalgic Act as 'Tok Mudim'

Kapitan Keling Mosque is well known as a center for community activities among the Indian Muslim community. Furthermore, after the mosque was proclaimed as one of the world heritage site by UNESCO, the mosque, and the surrounding area become a leading tourist center. Endresen (1999) pointed out that, World Heritage sites form the backbone of the tourism industry and make the place listed as the main attraction for tourists. Hence, the Indian Muslim community took the opportunity to intensify joint activities of the public and tourists through the World Heritage Day with a program 'Indian Muslim Cultural and Heritage Day'.

The purpose of this program is to revive traditional culture among the present generation as well as strengthen the ties among the Indian Muslim community. Additionally, Cultural and Heritage Day is also used as a platform further to facilitate the commercialization process and cultural products to be introduced to tourists. Community awareness to restore the culture to avoid young generation to forget their identity in the modern world makes India Muslim youths to act to revive their culture and history through introducing and promoting traditional games, food, costume and many more.



Fig. 4: (a) Demonstration and sample of Indian Muslim traditional food; (b) Demonstration of how the seller carries food, 'Nasi Kandar.'

4.3. Kapitan Keling Mosque as Dissemination Religious and Information Center

The mosque has established preacher bureaus or guides to provide guidance and information on Kapitan Keling Mosque and Islam because tourists who visit the mosque have very high curiosity. The guide describes the mosque, the prayers and procedures in Islam. There is a special office in the tower that collects photos, videos and books to provide information. It is rarely seen that so many tourists visit a mosque and at the same time guided by tour guides who will provide information on the mosque. There are informants, who shared their experience dealing with tourists, provide feedback and give opinions about the mosque, their heritage, and Islam. Most of the tourists who visit the area around Georgetown will usually approach the mosque because of its architecture, symbolization of the local community, located at a heritage site and eager to participate in special programs.

Normally, those who visit the mosque not only to see its architecture but also have the intention to see how Muslims pray.



Fig.. 5. (a) The preacher bureau giving information on the mosque and Islam; (b) Tourists need to wear decent costumes when visiting the mosque.

4.4. Sustainability of Indian muslim heritage identity

A legacy is not easy to be maintained without effort and awareness of every individual in the society. Heritage preservation process involves continuous effort. Founder of Kapitan Keling Mosque is a member of the Indian Muslim community. Now, the interesting situation can be seen in the Kapitan Keling Mosque where efforts to maintain their real identity is still ongoing. Highlighting the origin of society is also demonstrated through the use of Tamil language in the mosque. Daily operations at the mosque implemented through the use of two languages namely Tamil and National language (*Bahasa Malaysia*). Tamil is used to maintain the artistic heritage of the Indian Muslim community as the basis of consolidation, especially in India Muslim mosque.

Most programs such as religious lectures will be delivered after evening prayers in Tamil while the used of *Bahasa Malaysia* is only occasionally. During the Friday prayers in Kapitan Keling Mosque, sermon will be given in *Bahasa Malaysia* and Tamil for weekly schedule. According to the chairman of the mosque, the main reference used in Masjid Kapitan, is according to the ‘Hanafi sect’ were mostly brought from India and Pakistan. But the practice community in India and Pakistan is quite different from the society in Malaysia because the majority of Malaysian is the ‘Shafi’i’ sect followers. Therefore, to meet the needs of the followers of two different denominations, Kapitan Keling Mosque led by an imam of the Hanafi sect and another from Shafi sect.

4.5. Kapitan Keling Mosque: A social, religious power for local communities "Ramadhan, Tarawih and Makan bertalam."

Ramadhan is a holy month for Muslims. In this month, Muslims perform the acts of worship and give alms than normal days because, in Islam, all the good practices are rewarded manifold in Ramadhan. The Indian Muslim community is well known for their love of charity; they take the opportunity during this month to give alms to the poor, charity, in terms of money, food and clothing. Furthermore, during Ramadan, the excitement can be seen in every mosque by eating and breaking fast together in the mosque after fasting for a whole day, from dawn to dusk. Kapitan Keling Mosque often serves *nombhe kanji* (in Tamil) or for better understanding, it is called spiced porridge. It is slightly different in terms of the spices and is cooked in a traditional way. Meanwhile, the drink is ginger water. Remarkably in this Kapitan Keling Mosque, the numbers of people increase when approaching the 27th night of Ramadhan.

Sunnah and the practices of the Muslim leader, Prophet Muhammad SAW which is, *makan bertalam* or eating in trays will not be forgotten especially on the 27th night of Ramadhan. It is still practiced by the Indian Muslims in the mosque until now. Many people who participated, regardless of age, gender or employment status, together they celebrate the night of 27th Day of Ramadhan. In fact, the hall in Kapitan Keling Mosque are filled with pilgrims. *Makan bertalam* is eaten together after the *Tarawih* prayers. In addition, the month of Ramadhan,

especially the 27th Ramadhan, is a good opportunity to give alms and has also become a culture for the successful business Indian Muslims who can afford to give alms to the needy. Therefore, whenever the arrival of 27 Ramadhan, many beggars will gather along the walkaway and around Kapitan Keling Mosque. This opportunity is taken by the beggars, forming rows starting from the entrance of the mosque. Donations are often given after the end of Tarawih prayers and *makan bertalam*.



Fig. 6. (a) *Nombhe* porridge traditionally cooked using firewood; (b) *Tarawih* prayers at Kapitan Keling Mosque in the month of Ramadhan



Fig. 7. (a) Preparation of food in trays for '*makan bertalam*' with Indian Muslim food especially on the 27th of Ramadhan; (b) 4-6 people eating in trays or '*makan bertalam*'



Fig. 8.(a) Many people, the beggars, sitting along the entrance of Kapitan Keling Mosque; (b) The beggars are from different races, Malays, Chinese and Indians, young and old, especially on the 27th of Ramadhan

5. Discussion

Results from the observation participated, and in-depth interviews conducted; two perceptions can be seen in this topic. Analysis was obtained through feedback from participation of domestic and foreign tourists as well as the involvement of the Indian Muslim community.

5.1. *Cultural Heritage Program at Kapitan Keling mosque restoring community spirit*

Indian Muslim community has its identity and uniqueness to be introduced. The identity conflict that has occurred within the community was due to the mixing of cultures between the Indians and Malays and has become a motivation to the community members to show and promote their local cultural heritage openly. The local community plays their role and conveys information through staging during the celebration. The involvement of tourists and visitors in the activities carried out by local people show their success in creating the tourist gaze. Programs that involve interaction between the local community and tourists can produce advantages for both parties (win-win situation); tourists enjoy their holiday by gaining valuable memories in their lives and at the same time the host community can introduce their cultural heritage while maintaining their identity. As mentioned by Sharpley & Sundaram (2005), residents are really interested in serving tourists. They highlight their tradition to satisfy tourists' curiosity and attract more tourists.

The Indian Muslim community has been facing challenges in their environment whenever there's a clash of cultures. For the younger generation, they form groups and make decisions based on what they see and absorb the culture according to their lifestyle. The conflict of 'forgetting cultural' or 'do not know' culture will gradually erode their identity. Hence, the Indian Muslim community in the younger generation began to cooperate and succeeded in reducing the dilemma they faced before. Diversity program organized not only serves to convey information, in fact, hints of cultural and heritage activities have been designed to restore sanity to their minds.

Activities and effort are to instill awareness and to feel proud to other individuals of Indian Muslim. They seem more excited to recognize their true identity and not be ashamed to show themselves with their culture of origin. This situation suggests that community identity can be strengthened if they are united and work together in maintaining cultures. Indian Muslim community that came as visitors showed excitement, pride and feel appreciated after such programs are held. Most India Muslim informants stated their excitement with their old culture that was not practiced by them, and indirectly they are not ashamed to admit themselves as Indian Muslims.

5.2. *Kapitan Keling Mosque created 'Friendly' host and guest relationship*

Mostly, the feedback received from the fieldwork showed that there was a host-guest relationship when tourist participated in activities. Tourists make judgment through their observations and experience. Satisfaction of tourists through an interaction with local communities might create awareness among the public about Indian Muslim community. The involvement of tourists and community in 'presenting' the cultural heritage as the tourism product has created a picture of the Indian Muslim identity in Penang. They present it by applying traditional costume, music and dance, traditional foods, cooking materials, local business and form games for to the visitors. Kapitan Keling Mosque has become one of the 'friendly' places for visitors and tourists.

The tourists that pass through Kapitan Keling Street will do not hesitate to visit and discover the uniqueness and the history of this building even if they pass by without planned. The position that is located in the city center and very strategic has contributed to the popularity and splendor of the Indian Muslim product. The administrators of Kapitan Keling Mosque have adapted the 'friendly' concept to attract Muslim tourists and non-Muslims to recognize and approach the mosque. The opportunity and permission to enter the mosque are given to non-Muslims who intend to gain knowledge and to learn about Muslim and the mosque. Most travelers say that they have a high curiosity about the Indian Muslim heritage and religion of Islam. Various questions have been asked by them to the guide when visiting the mosque.

The Indian Muslim community has attracted the public and tourists through programs held at the Kapitan Keling Mosque. The main objective of choosing this location is to revive (nostalgia) cultural society that has existed in the past in this area. There are domestic tourists who took the opportunity to bring their children to visit around Kapitan Keling Mosque and the mini museum that displays information on the society and traditional equipment. In addition to the knowledge, the diversity programs, and multi-ethnic participation show harmony among all races in the country.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Kapitan Keling Mosque is a heritage product that is so valued in Penang. Gazetted as a world heritage site and with famous architecture was a strong motivating factor for tourists to visit, to appreciate the beauty and participate in activities at the Kapitan Keling Mosque. This mosque has become a cultural symbol and a landmark to show the presence of the Indian Muslim community in Penang. Cultural elements in the Kapitan Keling Mosque can be seen from the perspective of its visual art, photography, architecture, education and historical heritage. The impact of fame of the Kapitan Keling Mosque is a strength and consolidation in upgrading the cultural heritage and quality of the Indian Muslim community. Activities held had also given space to non-Muslims and foreign tourists to approach the mosque and interact with the people involved in the tourism industry.

There are several suggestions that can be considered in promoting and further develop the area of tourism and for its community development. Among the proposals listed are, creating galleries for the Indian Muslim community's heritage and culture, creating images at Kapitan Street, turning it into an Indian Muslim small town. Increase written materials on the Indian Muslim community and working with travel agents in producing tourism packages, encouraging the cultural heritage demonstrations, workshops and competitions with the participation of other communities in Malaysia can help in promoting and developing the Indian Muslim as a tourism product in the country. As a suggestion for the future, this research can be further developed by making a study on the appliance or equipments which are often used by ancestors, traditional musical instruments, dances, martial arts, taboos in everyday life and many more that can be made in the cultural heritage of the Indian Muslim community.

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