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Acculturation of Islamic Art and Chinese Culture in Tengkeru Mosque, Melaka

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Abstract

Acculturation is the process of acceptance of cultural elements between individuals or groups from other different cultures. A group of communities with a certain culture that are exposed to foreign elements are finally accepted and adapted to their own culture. The example of the acculturation can be found at the Tengkeru Mosque located in Melaka. The long process of acculturation illustrates the relationship between the Chinese minority and the Malay community has been firmly established. Chinese people emigrated to Melaka in the 15th century. They brought their customs and culture and this was introduced to the Muslim Malay community. The introducing of the Chinese culture has led to the acceptance of the Muslim community in Melaka. This study aims to identify the background or history of Chinese migration in Melaka. The research was also carried out to study the types of Chinese art and culture that have been mixed as decorations in the Tengkeru mosque. The research is qualitative in its form and to solve it, researchers used observation methods to study the types of Chinese art and culture in this mosque. The results of the study found that the Tengkeru Mosque shows the influence of Chinese culture in terms of decorative patterns and symbols on the components of the mosque and each of these symbols has its own meaning according to Chinese philosophy.

Keywords: Acculturation, Islam, Culture, Art, Tengkeru Mosque

Introduction

Acculturation is a process of acceptance of cultural elements among individuals or groups from other different cultures. A group of people with a certain culture is confronted with an element of a different foreign culture so that the foreign cultural element is finally accepted and worked out in its own culture without causing the loss of the original cultural personality (Awang, 2016). According to Suardi (2013) the presence of a new culture into the original culture will not undermine cultural values or eliminate the cultural identity of a nation. The process of cultural acculturation in Melaka took place easily, willingly without any coercion from the government at that time. Melaka grew into an enterpot port city and all official government affairs and trade activities were carried out in the vicinity of the estuary and river banks of the state (Empire of Melaka, 2010: 19).

The discovery of coins found during the development process is a testament to the existence of trade activities and the roles of Melaka River is the mainstay of trade activities in Melaka. The process of studying this coin dates back to 2000 and several forms of coins have been successfully discovered and traced along the river and several other locations in the heart of Melaka (PERZIM: 2012) The Melaka Malay Sultanate is known for its economic stability, fair government and systematic regulation. Because of this, many foreign traders from the Middle East, India and China come to Melaka not only to trade but also settle down and marry the locals. There are many foreign communities who inhabit Melaka and they live in harmony. Accordingly, the process of assimilation and acculturation takes place easily without any form of coercion among the communities residing in Melaka (Duarte, 1918: 176).

The Tengkeru sub-district is out of Melaka and existed during Portuguese rule. Before being replaced to Tengkeru, the area was known as Kampung Upeh with an off-coast island known as Upeh island once the centre of Islamic studies in the 15th century. The mosque was built around 1728M and is one of the oldest mosques in Melaka with the age of 293. The mosque was built in a year similar to the Kampung Hulu Mosque and eight years after the construction of the Peringgut Mosque. Most of the people who settled around Tengkeru were Indian merchants who had long settled and married local girls. The merchants were from Pakistan, India and Gujerat (Kohl, 1986: 2-3).

The Tengkeru Mosque located in the state of Melaka is built on a mix of traditional Melaka architecture, Europe, England and China. The mosque also has an eclectic décor which is a mixture of Chinese and local architecture. The mosque also has a pagoda-shaped tower built using concrete in 1850M, the mosque was refurbished and replaced to concrete while the floor was supplemented with coloured tiles. In 1910, the mosque was completely transformed into a construction using bricks and concrete and cement. Several other additions to the mosque have been made such as ablution pool, waqf building, toilet and sundial which can inform the time of prayer (Ali, 2015).

The Chronological of Chinese Mosque Construction in Melaka (1403M-1824M)

The largest architecture and design brought from China to Melaka by Chinese immigrants in particular coming from the South of the region has been going for the past 600 years (Kohl, D.G, 1986: 2-3). The early development of Chinese carpentry history in Melaka was seen to occur through two main phases around the 15th century C.E. and the 18th century. The first phase took place during the Ming Dynasty (1368M-1644M) and during the Melaka Malay Sultanate (1409M-1511M) while the second phase took place when Melaka was colonized by the Netherlands (1641M-1824M). Between the 16th and 17th centuries (1511M-1641M) the development involving Chinese carpentry in Melaka was not there due to the Portuguese occupation of Melaka.

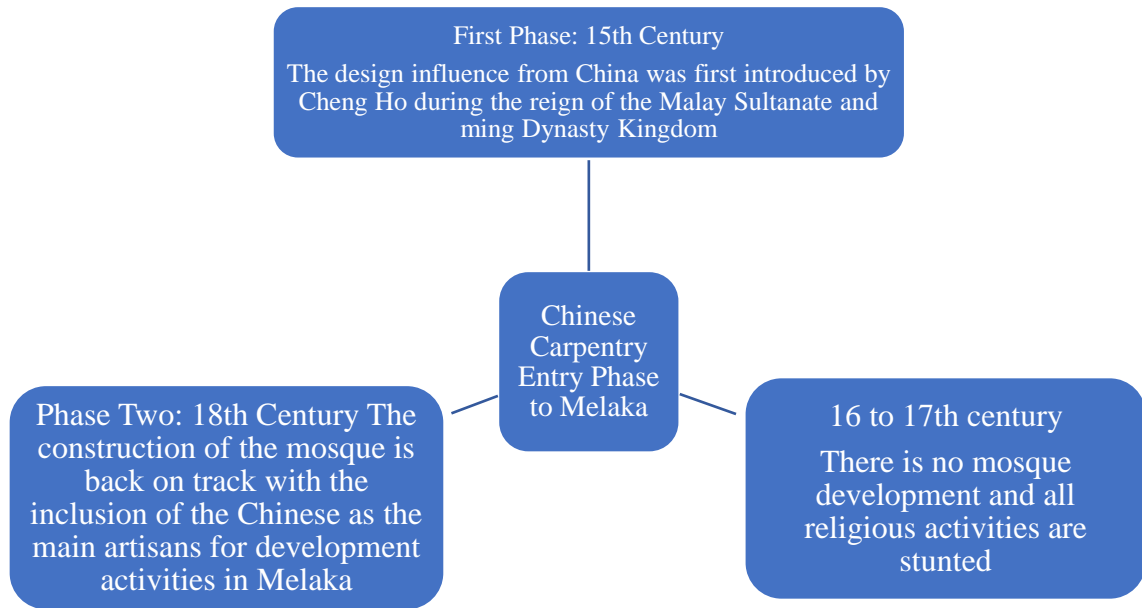


Figure 1: Entry Phase of Chinese Carpentry to Melaka

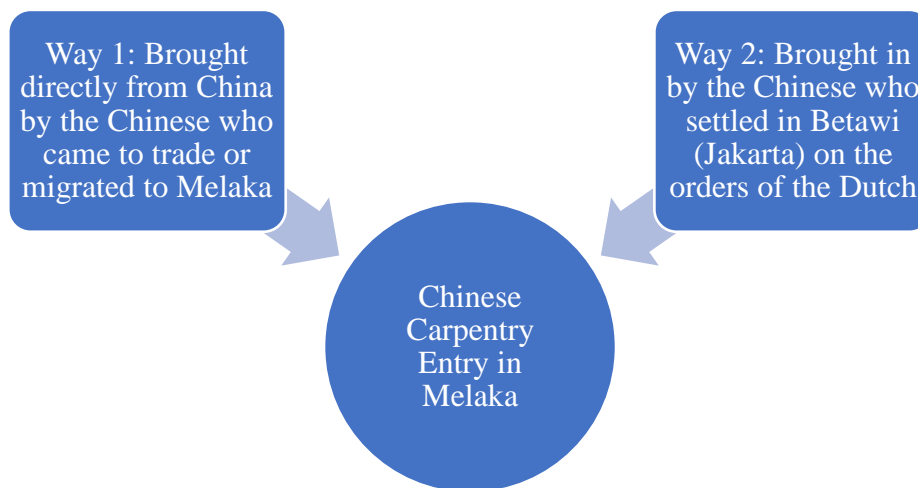


Figure 2: Chinese Carpentry Entry in Melaka

The first phase of the entry of Chinese carpentry into Melaka at this time took place through the first way. According to Arbi, the inclusion of Chinese carpentry influence was seen in tandem with the entry of Islam into Melaka and its development in the state (Arbi, 1971: 4). The development of mosques in Melaka took place as soon as Parameswara or Sultan Iskandar Syah converted to Islam (Cortesao, 1994: 241, Fauzia, 1991: 68). Along with that, Chinese design was first introduced in Melaka when the Melaka government established diplomatic relations with the Chinese government through Cheng Ho intermediate (Yuanzi, 2000: 29). The diplomatic relationship that is usually established between the two countries is not just an official relationship but is followed by an exchange of gifts to preserve the good relations of the countries involved. During the first visit of the Sultan of Melaka to China (1411M), the emperor gifted some Chinese craftsmen. upon returning to Melaka, they built a mosque with a Chinese architectural concept (Hamka, 1990: 447).

According to Tom Pires, the mosques in Melaka especially the Melaka Malay Sultanate mosque located near the sultan's palace are well-known and known mosques around the world and have similarities to the Grand Mosque of Demak (Cortesao, 1994: 249). The prototype of the Grand Mosque Demak was introduced to Melaka around the 15th century and the design has expanded widely to the waters of the West Coast. At this stage, the person who was instrumental in introducing the 'Melakan style' design was a Chinese craftsman who sailed with Cheng Ho and a sailor from Java who came to Melaka (Allan, 1996: 71). The statement proves that the official mosque of the Malay Sultanate has features built from China because the Grand Mosque of Demak was built according to Chinese architecture. While Cheng Ho is the individual responsible for introducing this building feature.

The rapid development of Chinese architecture at each stopover site also occurred with the support of the China government which encouraged the spread of culture especially during the reign of Emperor Ming Hsuang Tse. On this exclamation, Cheng Ho's will spread Chinese culture while voyage to Southeast Asia (Al-Qurtuby, 2003: 117) Hence, each of his voyages he brought together building materials and architectural design plans from China (Kohl, 1978: 2). In 1409M, Cheng Ho brought together items used for construction activities such as roof ceramic tiles specially designed to accommodate the roof of the Malay king's palace (Moorehead, 1957: 123). The tiles used in the early stages for development purposes in Melaka were indeed brought specifically from China (Lamprey, 1867: 157). Most of the development available in Melaka which is the palace and mosque has been developed according to the design from China using building materials brought by Cheng Ho (Wain, 2012: 5).

Chinese carpentry in the design of the mosque in Melaka became even greater when Emperor Cheng Le was appointed in the late 14th century. He has introduced several key features of Chinese design to Melaka and the state has absorbed the design of this building from China very well. The rectangular design of the mosque was developed and the walls of the mosque building were replaced with bricks. The laminated roof is supplemented with Chinese ceramics as a protector to the surrounding climate and the roof crown is introduced at the top of the roof as a new feature. The features and forms of the 'Melakan Style' mosque have similarities with pagodas in China and are widely developed throughout the Malay Islands (Yeang, 1992: 119).

In addition, the development of Chinese architectural design also developed when Princess Hang Li Po was brought to Melaka by Cheng Ho to be married to Sultan Mansur Syah in 1426M. The arrival of the princess together with her five hundred followers was placed in the Chinese Hill, resulting in a growing number of Chinese communities in Melaka. This migration also brought together the design and structure of their distinctive architecture (Moorehead, 125) and the construction was put into practice into the construction of the buildings erected in Melaka (Kohl, 1986: 3)

As a result of this royal marriage, there has been a new society created known as "Chinese Baba" or 'Chinese Peranakan. They way of their life is more similar to the Malay, as well as practicing Chinese culture and customs (Purcell, 1967: 61). Their carpentry skills also influenced the original architecture in Malacca (Arbi, 1975: 4). Thus, the presence of the princess's followers together with the design of the Chinese architecture has influenced the development based on the heritage is continued by the Peranakan Chinese descendants who are the heirs to the formation of Chinese art and culture. According to Pires, a mosque was developed on the orders of Sultan Mansur Syah in Melaka and it was intended to provide facilities for the community to perform worship (Cortesao, 1994: 249).

However, the mosques in Melaka during the heyday of the Melaka Malay Sultanate were destroyed by the Portuguese during the occupation of the state. The Portuguese destroyed the king's palace, the hall and the mosque on Penang Hill which is now known as St. Paul's Hill to erect fortifications and churches (Budin, 1978: 18) as well as to burn the mosque building outside the city area (Pintado, 1993: 333). Apart from the mosque, the Portuguese also destroyed local architecture and government buildings including tombs (Nasir, 2004: 90). Although the mosque building was destroyed, the prototype of the mosque was still used as a guide to build mosque after the Portuguese suffered the fall in 1641M (Hamka, 1980: 447).

The inclusion of carpentry from China during the second phase took place through the first and second means. The first way happened when the Chinese who disagreed with the new power and rebelled against the transition of power between the Ming Dynasty to Qing (1644M-1911M) had emigrated and made Melaka a destination. The move has brought together Chinese customs, culture, arts and architectural heritage (Kohl, 1978: 117). The second way happened when the Dutch invited the Chinese from Betawi (Jakarta) to Melaka. Based on the increasing number of Chinese communities during the Dutch rule, there is evidence of the influx of Chinese immigrants to Melaka under the Dutch directive to assist in the development process planned by the Netherlands including the construction of a mosque in Melaka (Allan, 1996: 79).

The presence of Chinese in Melaka was very welcomed by the Dutch and their skills were also recognized (Hoyt, 1996: 24). Most of the Chinese who came to Melaka were from Guangdong and had skills in carpentry and worked as building artisans and carpenters (Handinoto, 2007: 29). They also mastered the whole field and even the presence of craftsmen from Europe could not compete with Chinese craftsmen (Andaya, 1983: 207).

Chinese design and architecture not only be seen in the Melaka mosques but also at the construction of shop houses, terraces, non-Muslim houses of worship and mosques (Seow, 1983: 776). In addition, the influence of Chinese architecture is also found on the design of the houses that have courtyards with a large garden. The décor on the furniture of the Chinese house is also noticeable effects and influences and can be seen to this day (Arbi, 1971: 3). According to Allan (1996) the roof of the Melaka mosque was built by Chinese craftsmen who built Chinese synagogues. This proves that the Involvement of the Chinese in the carpentry process in Melaka is not specific to the construction of Chinese temples but also involves the development of mosques and other buildings in the state.

The Chinese's skills were held so highly that a Malay leader sent a letter to western governments asking some Chinese craftsmen to help carve the royal tombstone (Watson, 1983: 210). The Chinese's skills in the art of carving have begun to gain attention from the government and were entrusted to carve out the walls of buildings in Melaka. Based on the observation, the authors found that the buildings of mosque had Chinese symbols carvings. The engravings are seen as having similarities with the carvings found in the Chinese temple. The similarities prove that the artisans involved in the process are the same individuals and are responsible for producing interesting carvings on the mosque.

The Chinese community has played an important role in the construction of the mosque in Melaka. The prototype of the mosque in rural areas is according to the mosque building found in the city of Melaka Tengah. The mosque was developed using bricks, a critical roof as well as a flowerbed with Chinese symbols carving ornaments and alongside the mosque building is a tower in the shape of a Chinese pagoda (Arbi, 1975: 11). The existence of this interesting form of style began to spread throughout the state of Melaka and the style as

"Melakan style which refers to the use of bricks, critical roofs as well as mourners with carved ornaments of Chinese symbols and alongside the mosque building there is a tower in the form of a Chinese pagoda (Arbi, 1975: 11). Overall, all the mosques developed under the Dutch colony were in the urban area as the city was the focal point and also the centre of Dutch rule at that time. There are five mosques developed under the Dutch government, namely Peringgitan Mosque (1720M), Kampung Hulu Mosque (1728M), Tengkeran Mosque (1728M), Pengkalen Rama Mosque (1730M) and Kampung Keling Mosque (1748M).

Based on the first phase, Cheng Ho's voyage to Southeast Asia and the migration of Princess Hang Li Po to Melaka have had a major impact on the formation of the design of the mosque which has a Chinese element. The migration brought with them the design plan of the building practiced in Melaka. Through the second phase, the Chinese community invited from Betawi and those who migrated from China to Melaka played a role in the mosque development process.

The Grand Mosque of Demak which was developed around the Cheng Ho cruise period has been an exemplary plan for the artisans to set up a mosque in Melaka and this plan has been used twice to build a mosque in Melaka which is in the first phase around the 15th century during the heyday of the Melaka Malay Sultanate and the second phase in the 18th century when the Dutch began to open up space for the local community to practice religious teachings and assist the development of mosques in Melaka. Therefore, the Chinese craftsman was playing an important role in helping the Muslim community in Southeast Asia to sketch a mosque building. Eventually, it became a guide for the construction of other mosques in the Malay Islands in particular until it became a form of traditional mosque building for the Muslim community in the region.

Symbolism of Symbols and Ornamentation According to Chinese Philosophy

Symbols and ornamentations are closely related in the construction of the mosque. These mosques come up with their own architectural style and are complete with diverse shapes, styles and patterns according to life, customs and human background that produce them (Abdul Rochym, 1983: 3). In addition, the rulers often ordered the construction of lavish mosques to highlight the influence of a ruler's wealth and power especially when an Islamic state reaches an excellent level. Some people believe that in order to recognize and understand the background of a country we need to look to the architecture displayed by the ruler. The building is a symbol of the background, atmosphere and community that resides in the country (Abdul Rochym, 1983: 31). What determines the value and architectural quality of a building is through the culture of a nation according to the tastes and desires of the nation (Yanxin, 2006: 85).

Therefore, culture is the factors that help humans to produce an art and design that develops along with human thinking (Rini Trisulowati, 2008: viii). The decorations that can be seen are from the use of materials that correspond to the environment, climate and topography. Known that China is the earliest civilization in introducing decorations and ornate symbols. The result of the influence has become a reference to the other country to produce art and attractive ornament (Rawson, 1984: 11).

In Chinese carving art, symbols and ornaments are incarnated in their own form and style and each of them has its purpose and philosophy. The symbols used usually symbolize good meanings based on the myths, philosophy, history and tradition (Hock and Said, 2012: 7). Carvings and symbols become an important part of the building and each of these decorations has its own purpose and ideology (Ma, 1992: 6). Chinese art is the result of

assimilation among cultures, customs and religions. Feng Shui is one of the impressions that exerted a great influence in Chinese art. Most of the embellishments in traditional Chinese art are not merely decorations without any meaning but decorations are an important ornamentation in a building to convey a true story to the beholder. The jewelry inside this building is in accordance with the concept and materials used in a building (Yanxin and Bingjie, 132).

The symbols used are based on the beliefs and culture of the Chinese people towards the art of development and natural nature (William, 1974, xx). There are eight Buddha symbols that are often used as symbols and decorations and each of these symbols has its own purpose and function (Stalbergh, 1983: 39). The example are wheels, shell, paired of fish, eternal ties, lotus flowers, vase, ceilings and symbols. (Six Centuries of Islamic Art in China, 2001: 74) The Chinese people believe that every object around them has a spirit and if they do not worship this spirit, they will easily get sick or be overwritten by unfortunate. In connection, every symbol used is considered to be able to provide protection to the Chinese people who cling to it. These symbols have been ingrained in the minded of the Chinese people as good and positive harvesters who will bring prosperity to them (May, 2008: 22).

Symbols and ornamentations in Chinese art can generally be divided into seven groups consisting of flora, fauna, geometry, cosmos, calligraphy, equipment and human disposition (Hock and Said, 5). The author will only discuss the groups that have been encountered throughout the study. Based on the author's study, Tengkeri mosque has six types of Chinese symbols and ornamentation consisting of flora, fauna, phenomena, geometry, fruit and cosmos symbols. Each of these symbols has been planned to be applied to every component encountered. Overall, the author finds that each of these symbols gives meaning to the Chinese people.

There are several key points that are emphasized in their lives and each of those desires should be achieved by each individual who professes the belief which are wealth, success, knowledge, luck, medicine, health, longevity, beauty and honor. They see all these elements as something important to achieve in order to ensure happiness in their lives. Accordingly, all these symbols are embodied in the form of engravings with the aim of getting good luck from these symbols. Based on the interview with the museum officer, these ornaments are applied in the Chinese community daily life such as clothing, furniture, personal jewelry, ceramic pottery and tableware (Tan, 2022). The author has classified all Chinese symbols and ornamentations according to the categories of symbols found in the Tengkeri Mosque as per the following diagram 3.

Chinese Symbols and Ornamentation in Tengkeri Mosque

Based on the studies conducted, there are about 97 Chinese symbols and ornamentations can be found at the Tengkeri Mosque. The mosque, which was developed in 1728, is unique with a mix of foreign architecture. This uniqueness clearly demonstrates the process of culture that took place as a result of the combination of Islamic architecture and Chinese symbols is a good form of adaptation based on the significant development of this mosque with foreign art elements and does not fully highlight the Islamic decoration. The local community's acceptance of foreign art shows a positive attitude. However, based on the interview conducted on July 2022, there are also local communities who do not understand and are sensitive to the foreign symbols in the mosque.

Although some of the symbols found to be incompatible with the teachings of Islam, the symbols are considered as a form of heritage and acceptance of the local community

towards Chinese culture due to its outstanding values and philosophical heights. The discovery of this symbols shows a striking similarity with the building of Chinese temples found in the state of Melaka. The engraving of the Chinese symbols can be found on every component part of the mosque such as the pulpit, prayer room, mihrab, mosque tower, ceiling and ablution room. According to the results of the study, there are six categories of symbols found in this mosque as can be seen in table 1.

Table 1

Symbols and Ornamentation at Tengkeru Mosque

Symbol	Flower	Total	Animal	Total	Fruit	Total	Geometry	Total	Cosmos	Total	Phenomenon	Total
1.	Lotus	26	Dragon	6	Peach	2	Fret	2	Teratai	5	Chinese Lantern	6
2.	Plum	6	Swallow	8	Banana	2	Chinese Calligraphy	4	Wheel	1		
3.	Peony	4	Tapir	2			Swastika	4	Bluster Vase	2		
4.	Orchid	4	Frog	1			Geometri	2	Layer Vase	4		
5.									Fruit Container	2		
6.									Artmesia Leaf	4		
Total		40		17		4		12		18		6

According to table 1, the total number of Chinese symbols found in the Tengkeru Mosque is 97 symbols. The highest symbol is the flower which is 40 symbols with four types of flowers, Lotus, Plum, Peony and Orchid. The Lotus symbol has 26 engravings. Plum flowers have six symbols carvings followed by Peony and Orchid flowers which each have four engravings. There are nearly 17 animal symbols consisting of a dragon engraving of six motives, Swallow with eight symbols, followed by a Tapir with 2 symbols and a frog of 1 symbol. Carving of fruits of four symbols consisting of Peach and Banana fruits. The whole geometric symbols are 12 motives. Geometric carving of two symbols, followed by a fret engraving of two symbols, Chinese calligraphy writing with a total of four symbols and a swastika engraving of four motives. The cosmos symbols are 18, five lotus symbols, one-wheel symbols, two bluster jar symbols, four-layer vase symbols, two fruit containers and four former Artmesia leaf. There are six motives of the phenomenon represented by the engraving of Chinese lantern symbols.

Conclusion

The Chinese community has been in Melaka since the reign of the Melaka Malay Sultanate due to trade and business, cruise diplomatic affairs and marriage. Their presence in the state was also traced back to the days of Portuguese rule but in small numbers and their numbers became large when the Dutch ruled. Their presence in Melaka due to the factors discussed has left an impact on the development of the design of the mosque building in Melaka. Chinese architecture has been introduced and the impact can be seen on the development of mosques under Dutch occupation.

The openness shown by the Dutch has made room for the local community to undergo religious activities and they were given land and provisions to develop the mosque. The Chinese community invited to assist in the development was responsible for building the mosque and the architectural components of the Chinese elements were absorbed as the

main elements in the construction such as the roof crown, tendrils, pagoda-shaped towers, Chinese arch-shaped gates, pulpit and pyramid-shaped roofs.

Each of these components is engraved with engravings of Chinese symbols and each of these decorations has a specific meaning that complements the meaning of the Chinese philosophy that is the lifeblood of this society. The goals in Islamic and Chinese arts have a big difference where Islamic art prioritizes tauhid in the arts activities and the artwork will give birth to a specialist in worship. Activities in Islamic art also have the goal of gaining blessings and blessings from the creators. Different from Chinese art who see the activity of art as the importance of gaining worldly happiness alone in addition to realizing all their desires and desires. This cultural culture clearly demonstrates the openness of the Melaka community who are receptive to foreign culture but still maintain their own identity and culture.

This article contributed by adding new knowledge in explaining the contextual art motive of chinese specifically for the historic mosque in Melaka. This motive is unique which is an ecstatic value that can only be found in Tengker Mousque. Meanwhile for contextual contribution, this art motive is able to educate the current generation in the of appreciation as certified by UNESCO's recognition.

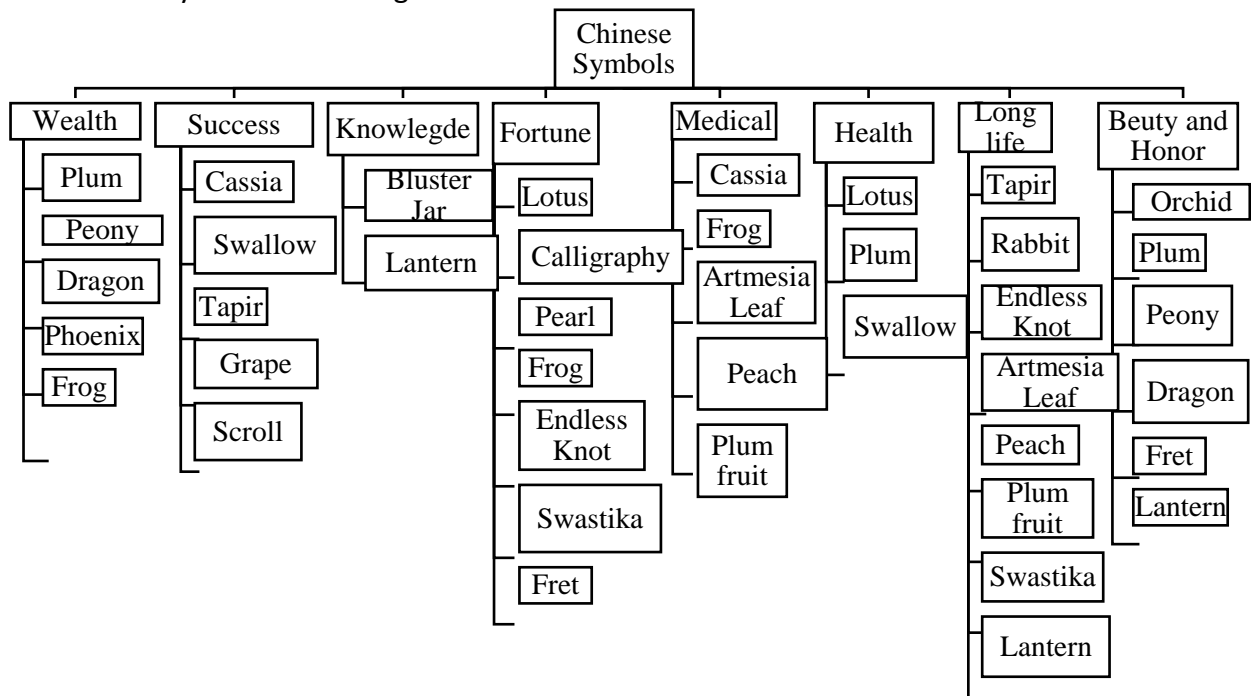


Diagram 3: Meanings and Symbols Behind Chinese Motives and Ornamentations

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