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## Semiotic Approach in Evaluating Traditional Madrasa Design as Communal Development Centre

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## Research Highlights

This study highlights on the semiotics approach as method to analyse the traditional madrasa design and describes how its built form architectural elements comprising of factors like location and placement, size and scale, facade and structure, access and circulation as well as hierarchy and spatial function represent the communal values as a sign. This is imperative towards the formation of sustainable madrasa community for a better teaching and learning environment.

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## Research Objectives

This paper had three main objectives. First, is to describe on the function and features of traditional madrasa as well as describe on the factors that influences traditional madrasa design as a communal centre. Second, is to elucidate how the architectural elements in general may symbolize communal values as sign using semiotic approach and third, is to explain to what extend this communal values are embedded in the traditional madrasa design for to portray its role as communal development centre. This research is significant for two main reason. First, it will become referential guideline to elevate the quality of modern madrasa design in establishing a sustainable community. Second, contributes to the new body of knowledge on the study of traditional design madrasas that focuses on its architectural function and style to become a successful communal center. This is because, to date there had been no study done yet to describe either on traditional madrasa design as a communal centre nor to represent the value of community through its architectural representation namely in the context of Malaysia. Many current literatures on madrasa mostly focuses on the documentation of madrasa historical background in general according to district or region(Blanchard, 2007); documentation on madrasah architectural style and formmaking(Belmessaoud-Boukhalfa, 2012); documentation on madrasah curriculum and teaching processes(Qasmi, 2002) as well as the rehabilitation and conservation of old historical madrasa in the Muslim world(Park & Niyozov, 2008). This study will provide an established framework embracing the characteristics of communal values relating to the traditional madrasa design that can become as a guideline for future scholars, designers, policy makers, and authorities in establishing a better madrasa architecture in the future which embraces communal values towards the development of sustainable community.





## Methodology

This study makes use of multiple case study as a research strategy to derive detailed findings through comparison. For data gathering methods, this study uses direct observation and literature review as it enables generation of new ideas and provide an opportunity for researchers to present their views and validate the proof of findings. While conducting the process of observation, five design indicators that related to communal architecture like size and scale, location and placement, facade and structure, access and circulation as well as hierarchy and spatial arrangement are adopted. To interpret built form as a symbol to convey message to user and observe the relationship and the representation of communal value through building elements, structuralist paradigm (Culler, 2014) supported by semiotic methodology (Chandler, 2007) are used. This is because structuralist paradigm and semiotic methodology enables to validate the two case studies, which are the Madrasah Quran Kubang Bujuk and the Madrasah Al-Rahmaniah, as a symbol and system of signs that emphasis on denotation and connotation way of interpretation to understand the meaning behind the built form that is influenced by social significance and the surrounding conditions encompassing moralistic values (Hawkes, 2003). The findings are important to describe as well as how the madrasa built forms can contribute towards the needs and development of the community.

## Results

Results indicate that there are five similar characteristics and four different features that can be observed in these two madrasahs. Madrasah Al-Rahmaniah features communal architecture with a local community characteristic that has the appearance of a traditional 'pondok' religious school, in which the involved community are dominated by the surrounding villagers. In this regard, the architectural language that is used by madrasa Al-Rahmaniah is more open as it has multiple space that is easily accessed by the public. The building functions are multipurpose, easy to approach and, located to the nearby village settlement. The architectural approach of Madrasa Quran Kubang Bujuk, on the other hand, is more of a community practice type, that has the appearance of an institutionalized religious school. The Madrasah Quran Kubang Bujuk showcases the communal approach that emphasizes the madrasa's own users rather than give importance to outside users. In general, as an education institution it serves a much better educational facilities and appearance. The madrasa's planning configuration is more orderly. The spaces are connected by corridorways from the learning classes to other spaces. This creates sense of surveillance and security between the





madrassa's inhabitants because every movement can be observed by anyone that is within the madrassa's environment. The spatial movement within the madrassa branches out but directed to the surau that acts as a gathering place to control the space movement. Architecture therefore is viewed as a symbol that can control and deter immoral behavior of the user if the environment setting is within a disciplined environment (Brandt, 2000). Hence a good architectural design contributes in guiding people to have virtuous behaviour according to the principles of the Quran and Hadith.

## Findings

Findings indicate that both traditional madrasahs functioned as a unique communal development center and it is depicted on the appearance of the architectural design with its own approach. The study found that there are communal values embedded in both Madrasah Al-Rahmaniah and Madrasah Quran Kubang Bujuk owned and managed by the Islamic Reformists. The development of madrasah is influenced by 5 communal values namely transparency, obligation, decency, modesty, and gratitude represented through the five madrasah elements like location and placement, scale and size, facade and structure, access and circulation and hierarchy of space arrangement. In overall, both madrasahs are proven to be a successful model which not only acts as a communal development center, but also functions as a place for teaching and learning of Islam. This is achieved through its design approach and representation that are embedded with Islamic communal values. Hence, these two madrasahs proven to be capable in translating and cultivating communal values through its design form and space making as architecture is also viewed as the primary medium in delivering the messages of Islam to the community.

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