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## Exploring the Islamic Garden Concept as Inspirational Landscape Design

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### Abstract

This paper presents a review on the Islamic garden concept in the context of a heterogeneous society. The aim of this paper is to understand the Islamic garden concept in response to the heterogeneous society in Malaysia. The finding of this research will help to improve the understanding and appreciation towards the Islamic garden concept, as well as the implementation of the concept in the landscape design. It is hoped that the paper can relate to the idea of Islamic garden concept as an inspiring landscape design in creating an environmental setting in the era of urban regeneration.

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*Keywords:* Islamic garden; landscape design; heterogeneous society

### 1. Introduction

The Islamic Empire spanned from the seventh to the 16th century (Safei Hamed, n.d.). It starts from the establishment of the first Islamic State in Medina to the peak of the Ottoman Empire. The Islamic civilization dominated an era, encompassed half the world, and shaped the history of the human race (Spahic Omer, 2005). Through the influences of the Islamic rulers, several prominent Islamic gardens were developed, for instance, in Western Asia (Iran, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula), Southeastern Asia (India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan), The Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia) and Europe Spain (Granada, Cordova, Seville and Toledo). The development of the Islamic garden expanded from one region to another, and some of the remaining

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evidence manages to be preserved. However, the physical evidence may have gradually lessened due to change of ruler and the falls of Islamic governance, especially after the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the Islamic gardens such as the Generalife Al-Hamra, Spain; Mughal garden and Taj Mahal, India are among the cherished gardens during the Islamic civilization that remain as a legacy of the influential era of Islamic rulers. Hence, this suggests that the developments of the Islamic garden are well-known and recognized by the whole world. However, the uncertain question is; i) What is Islamic garden and how to differentiate the characteristic of the Islamic garden with other prominent garden such as the France and Japanese garden and ii) Will the implementation of the Islamic garden concept be accepted by the heterogeneous society, specifically in the Malaysian landscape design. Therefore, further elaborations on the questions elaborate in this paper.

## 2. Problem Statement

There are several issues regarding the understanding of Islamic garden from both global and local perspectives have been identified from the literature. These issues suggest that the lacking of comprehension and appreciation of Islamic garden due to the inadequate references and physical evidences on the topic. Some issues highlighted are:

- There are several prominent early Islamic gardens, for instance, the Generalife Al-Hamra, Spain, Taj Mahal, India, Mughal Garden and Pakistan (Wescoat, 1990; Delgado et al., 2007; Solmaz Mohammadzadeh Kive, 2012). These gardens are among the cherished gardens during the Islamic civilization that remain as a legacy of the influential era of Islamic rulers. However, the essence of the Islamic garden may have gradually lessened as the prominent garden was developed ages ago, and there is a deficiency in physical evidence to support that the essence of Islamic garden has been adapted in other parts of the world. Islam is the second largest religion in the world; hence, this suggests that the Islamic garden should be among the principles to be followed in garden design. However, the preliminary ground research suggested otherwise. This issue lies on the fact that there is inadequate guideline for people to refer to and continue the idea of the Islamic garden, in term of the essence or physical representation. As such, for people to maintain the essence of the Islamic garden into the present time, a study on the Islamic garden has to be conducted for future reference.
- The prominent Islamic gardens focused more towards the Middle East countries, as the area is predominantly with Muslim society; therefore, the garden evolved around the city was developed based on the Islamic principles. Nonetheless, this research will shed light on the Asia perspective on the idea of Islamic garden, specifically in Malaysia. Malaysia is an Islamic country, consisting of a heterogeneous mix of ethnic groups, with three main groups of races which are Malay, Chinese and Indian. According to the Department of Statistic Malaysia 2010, the ethnic compositions are as follows, (67.4% Malay, 24.6% Chinese, and 7.3% Indian). Although Malaysia is recognized as heterogeneous society, Islam remains as the state religion and the predominant society is Muslim. Since Malaysia consists of several ethnicities, the question remains on how to adapt the concept of the Islamic garden in response to the local environment and heterogeneous society. Previously, before the colonial intervention, Malaysia is developed based on the Islamic principle, whereas Islam is the only reference to guide in every aspect of human life. However, in order to achieve the independence, the federation of Malay agreement was formulated by British-Malay Pleno conference between June and December 1946 and Malaysia officially achieved independence on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1957. Nevertheless, for Malaysia to obtain their freedom, the country has to surrender three important influences aspects, namely the government, legal and education system. Those three influences aspects that were previously according to Islamic guidelines have changed to the British system, which are legal system (*Syariah* to Civil system), education (Islam to British system) and government system (Sultan to

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