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WINNER OF THE MALAYSIAN SOCIETY FOR MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY (MSMBB) EDUSTEMX GRANT 2022 WINNER

Assistant Professor Dr Tan Choon Hui

Assistant Professor Dr Tan Choon Hui has recently won the Malaysian Society for Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (MSMBB) EduSTEMX Grant 2022. The title of her proposal is "Food Science (STEM) to combat Climate Change and World Hunger". Climate change will undoubtedly result in increased severity in world hunger, where more and more people will have less access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. In this regard, STEM plays a crucial role in combating climate change and food insecurity issues. Knowledge in food science can be employed to produce nutrient-dense foods with improved utilization. This brings about the development of a series of food science modules that comprises of ready-to-use and flexible activities for pre-university teachers. The objectives of this project are to assess the quality of the developed food science modules and to determine students' engagement upon completing the modules.



Assistant Professor Dr Tan Choon Hui

There are four modules that will be constructed; "What's on the label?", "Food: How it's made", "Safe vs Unsafe Foods" and "Food Development for a Sustainable Food Future". In each module, an active learning activity will be utilized to increase students' interest and engagement. Collaborative learning will be inculcated in the problem-solving process. A group of 50 pre-university students will be recruited to attend the modules and students' feedback on the modules will be obtained using a questionnaire. Their engagement level will also be assessed using the same questionnaire. It is expected that this project will create a tool to improve students' knowledge in STEM through food science modules and increase their understanding on the role of food science in combating climate change and world hunger. This project is aligned with SDGs such as SDG No 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 4 (Quality Education), and will create awareness among students, realising the importance of STEM to transform and shape our future.

Content

Winner of the Malaysian Society for Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (MSMBB) EduSTEMX Grant 2022 Winner by Assistant Professor Dr Tan Choon Hui

Music Performance as Research: An Afterthought by Associate Professor Dr Cheong Yew Choong

Is It Always Good To 'Do Something Rather Than Nothing'? by Assistant Professor Dr Alwyn Lau

Rethinking The Role of Mosques for Community Development by Professor Dr Nangkula Utaberta

Current Research Grant Call, Exhibition and Symposium

MUSIC PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH: AN AFTERTHOUGHT

Associate Professor Dr Cheong Yew Choong

The UK's Research Assessment Exercise defines research as "original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding" (RAE 2008, 34). What is the role of a researcher in an "original investigation"? It is well known that at the outset the researcher develops research questions and hypotheses, proves everything explicitly with systematic methodology, rational justification and concrete evidence, leading to new explicit knowledge or a definite outcome. Ambiguity and subjectivity are anathema to the researcher.

On the other hand, a creative practitioner—including performer, composer, artist, dancer—is the antithesis of the researcher. For example, a performer envisages a realization of the ideal sound and musical images in order to convey the musical content and affects of the composition. Yet, what lies behind the performance—the untold hours of practice and experimentation with different interpretive choices—is to a certain degree elusive and inscrutable. It is rare for performers to talk about their artistic practice. Rather, most performers let the music speak for itself.

Of particular interest is the French composer Claude Debussy, in reply to his teacher Ernest Guiraud who was perplexed by his demonstration of unresolved "floating chords" at the piano (Figure 1), stated: "There is no theory. You merely have to listen. Pleasure is the law" (Lockspeiser, 207).



Figure 1 Debussy described these chords as "incomplete chords, floating. Il faut noyer le ton. [One must drown the tonality]" during a conversation with Ernest Guiraud in 1899. (Lockspeiser, 206–207)

Consider another example: the Spanish-born artist Pablo Picasso, spoke in a rare interview with Marius de Zayas in 1923:

I can hardly understand the importance given to the word research in connection with modern painting. In my opinion, to search means nothing in painting...When I paint, my object is to show what I have found and not what I am looking for. In art intentions are not sufficient and, as we say in Spanish, love must be proved by deeds and not by reasons. What one does is what counts and not what one had the intention of doing. (Barr 1939, 9)

Despite different profession and cultural background, there is common ground between Debussy and Picasso: their implicit responses reveal intuition and subjective view of their respective creativity. Neither did Debussy justify explicitly his unconventional choice of harmony nor did Picasso perceive his process/method of painting as "research." In short, creative practice and research are fundamentally different and hardly intertwined.

However, the last three decades have witnessed a paradigm shift, to a certain extent, from 'the opposition between practice and research' to 'the reconciliation between practice and research'. Today, the practice-oriented research, as conducted by creative practitioners, seems to be gaining widespread recognition among universities and conservatoires, as substantiated by the emerging literature which develops various terms and applications such as 'practice-based research', 'practice-led research', 'practice as research', 'artistic research', 'creative research' and 'performative research'. Both 'practice-based research' and 'practice-led research' are recognized by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) as the standard model for doctoral programs in performing arts.

A distinction in definition between 'practice-based research' and 'practice-led research' is summarized and illustrated with brief examples as follows:

1. Practice-based research is "an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practise and the outcomes of that practice... which may include artefacts such as images, music, designs, models, digital media or other outcomes such as performances and exhibitions" (Candy 2006, 3). For example: a research, through practice, on the assimilation of jazz improvisation and Malaysian folk music into the production of an original piano composition as creative output.

2. Practice-led research is "concerned with the nature of practise and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice...the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative outcome" (Candy 2006, 3). For example: a research, through practice, on the interpretation of musical notations based on the study of historical treatises, iconography and period instruments, leading to new insights for historically informed performance.

Despite a clear distinction in definition between two above-mentioned terms, there is no "one-size-fits-all" concept that is applicable to all possible forms of practice-oriented research. More importantly, what distinguishes the practice-oriented research lies in the fact that: (1) the same person plays a dual role of researcher and practitioner who conducts a single project or an interdisciplinary research with other creative practitioners, thus engaging with "symbiosis between research and creative practice in which each feeds on the other" (Smith and Dean 2009, 11), and (2) the "concept of iteration" is adopted as a principal model of creative and research processes which involve repetition and improvement through cycles of critical reflection and evaluation (Smith and Dean 2009, 19).

There is no better example than the German composer Beethoven who left a massive legacy of sketchbooks which documents a detailed record of his creative endeavours. The painstaking process of changes, corrections and even impetuous deletions inherent in Beethoven's sketchbooks constitutes the quintessence of iterative process (Figure 2). Beethoven, who was almost completely deaf, wrote in his conversation book with Louis Schlösser in 1823:

I carry my thoughts about with me for a long time, sometimes a very long time, before I set them down...I make many changes, reject, and reattempt until I am satisfied. Then the working-out in breadth, length, height and depth begins in my head, and since I am conscious of what I want to do, the basic idea never leaves me. (Sonneck, 146–147)

Through the iterative processes of 'doing' and 'reflecting' in a practice-based or practice-led research, the resulting effects or outcomes—creative ideas, images and insights—"can arise unexpectedly and radically distinct from whatever inputs that may have served as groundwork for the created product" (Smith and Dean 2009, 219).



Figure 2 Beethoven: Piano Sonata in E major Op. 109 (III), Autograph (Bärenreiter).

Afterthought on my performance and research activities

Since joining the faculty of Institute of Music at UCSI University in 2009, I have been actively involved in piano performance, which is regarded as a valid non-verbal form of musical enquiry equivalent to research output. Gradually, I begin to develop my research in and through piano performance with special interests in two areas: historically informed performance (HIP) and experimental processes of practice.

Firstly, I am interested to explore interpretive possibilities for idiosyncrasies in musical notations which seems to be defying the conventional meaning and thus posing interpretive challenges for performers. It is certainly not enough to interpret such notational idiosyncrasies through intuition or even musical influence from teachers and other pianists. Among the idiosyncratic notations that I have researched are dynamic hairpins (Figure 3), rhythmic assimilation of dotted notes and triplets and Beethoven dynamics as expressive connotations. Prompted by my interest in HIP, I examined original manuscripts and early editions, and analysed verifiable historical evidence relevant to the aforementioned notations. As a result, I gave a few lecture-recitals at conferences whereby I presented the contextualisation of the idiosyncratic notations, explained historical sources to rediscover the past practice, and reconstructed various interpretive possibilities through live performance. It must be stressed that HIP is not merely a research on 'forgotten' historical sources and 'lost' performing tradition but rather a performance-led research which transmits new insights into performance.

Secondly, I am interested to explore experimental processes of practice in preparing for a public performance. I am particularly interested to document the approaches to practising as potential knowledge: (1) avant-garde piano music that calls for unconventional techniques, and (2) any piano composition that features the element of improvisation, encompassing Baroque ornamentation, Classical cadenzas and Eingänge (lead-ins), and the mobile form of aleatoric music. The processes of practising will draw primarily on the iterative cycles of searching, experimenting, reflecting and evaluating—different ways at different stages of the research throughout—thereby contributing to new insights into the forming of technical regimes and musical ideas.

Can performance be considered as research? The Research Excellence Framework, which replaced RAE in 2014, has revised the definition of research as “a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared” (REF 2021, 90). It goes without saying that in my area of expertise, performance can serve as a non-verbal form of research tool in articulating new tacit knowledge such as substantially improved interpretive ideas, playing techniques or musical compositions, provided that the impact of the research is effectively shared with a wider community of performers, educators, students and audiences. To sum up, practice-oriented research or artistic research is all about: “cutting-edge developments in the discipline that we may broadly refer to as ‘art’; articulating knowledge and understandings as embodied in artworks and creative processes; searching, exploring, and mobilising – sometimes drifting, sometimes driven – in the artistic domain; creating new images, narratives, sound worlds, experiences; broadening and shifting our perspectives, our horizons; constituting and accessing uncharted territories; organised curiosity, reflexivity and engagement; connecting knowledge, morality, beauty, and everyday life in making and playing, creating and performing” (Borgdorff 2012, 102).

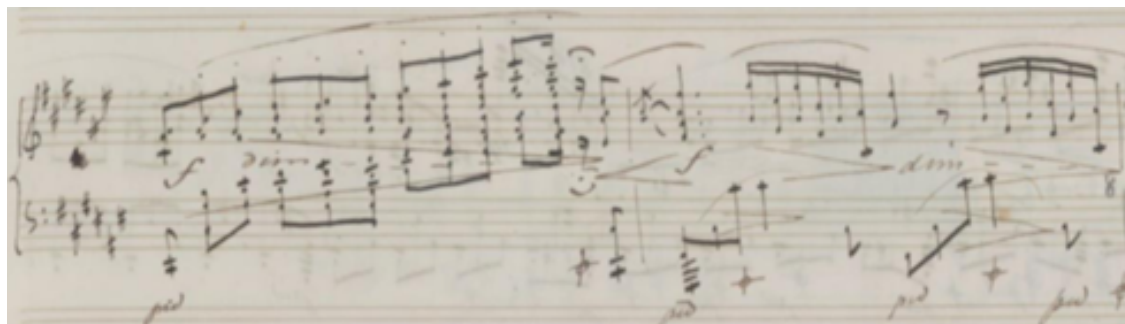


Figure 3 Chopin: Barcarolle Op. 60, Autograph. Courtesy of the British Library.
http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=zweig_ms_27_f001r

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Associate Professor Dr Cheong Yew Choong holds his Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate Degrees from West Virginia University (USA) under full scholarship and graduate assistantship. Despite hearing impairment, Dr Cheong is a prize-winner of several competitions: Music Teachers National Association Collegiate Artist Piano Competition in the State of West Virginia, WVU's Annual Young Artists Auditions and the VSA Arts's International Young Soloists Award.

He has performed as a soloist and collaborative pianist in Malaysia, Austria, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and the United States. As an educator, Dr Cheong has presented lecture recitals on historical performance practice, at the conferences in Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand and Switzerland. He has served as research review committee for Mahidol University College of Music in Thailand and is currently a member of Mahidol Music Journal's Editorial Board.

IS IT ALWAYS GOOD TO 'DO SOMETHING RATHER THAN NOTHING'?

Assistant Professor Dr Alwyn Lau

More than thirty years ago, management guru Tom Peters published the landmark book, *In Search Of Excellence*, containing his observations of the corporate habits of the best companies in America. One of those habits cum principles was 'A Bias for Action' i.e. top performing companies have leaders and managers are inclined towards doing, moving, taking action, etc.

This preference for action makes (obvious) sense, especially in places where the 'lepak' culture has infiltrated its way into corporate culture. Intuitively, too, which leader wouldn't prefer workers who naturally take steps to fix or create stuff?

What, then, could possibly be wrong with a 'bias for action'? As it turns out, quite a bit.

Consider: How many times have you witnessed a manager issue an order which a) was poorly thought out and b) involved countless man-hours and c) took away resources from other on-going assignments? And everybody knows the dude gave that piece of instruction because he wanted to 'look good'? Likewise, how many times have certain activities in office been done simply because the 'KPI needed to be met'?

And how many times have our politicians initiated pointless projects which, again, a) took away resources from other priorities and b) only encouraged nepotism and cronyism? It also doesn't take a political genius to figure out that most of these ventures only happen because the MP in question wanted to project the image of 'doing something'.

How many times have you personally wished you haven't gone to that mall to buy that thing you didn't need, which you did so only because you were bored or just 'had to buy something'? How many times have you regretted uttering that phrase or remark, which you did only because you were uncomfortable staying silent?

How many parents are going broke because it's the school holidays and, well, the family 'should go somewhere'? How many Malaysians are about two steps away from a heart-attack because it's dinner time and even though we're not that hungry we 'should just eat something'?

Behold, the action bias i.e. that irrational human tendency to prefer action even if the costs are ultimately higher than inaction, and even if maintaining the status quo (or plain waiting and being patient) would bring more benefits.

It's like pushing the 'Close Door' button in the lift. Seriously, do those three seconds saved really matter? Based on the ferocity with which people press the button, I'm guessing every milli-second counts. Then again, these same folks will spend hours checking trivial WhatsApp notifications, so I can't tell.

Understanding the action bias, however, suggests that it's not the seconds saved but the need to do something—anything—instead of waiting.

Or like pedestrians waiting at the side of the road for the happy green man in the light to replace the stern-looking red man (and since we're on this topic, why does the figure always look like a man? Don't women cross roads, too?). There's always a button there to press, presumably to speed up the change to green so we can cross the road.

Does anybody still believe it makes a difference in time? In fact, in some countries many of these devices are simply dud boxes with no electrical wiring whatsoever i.e. they're there to give folks something to stab at with their fingers and elbows whilst they wait. Ergo, the action bias.



Figure 1: 'Walk' buttons

The 'walk' buttons pedestrians press to speed up the green light. Chances are it makes no difference at all, yet it caters to our need to 'do something' whilst waiting (i.e. our action bias).

In sum, elevator close-door buttons and pedestrian green-light buttons serve the purpose of making life less stressful by playing to the manner in which our brains are structured. These devices are there to soothe our psychological distaste for doing nothing, even if the end result of doing something is no different from, well, the opposite.

Saving ourselves from the action bias

Lifts and road-crossings are minor things. But, as mentioned, when corporate folks and politicians play havoc and create more risks simply because doing nothing (or doing less) doesn't look good, our communities suffer.

Don't you think Malaysia would benefit from one week of zero issues? As I write, the hot topics seem to be a call for atheists to be 'hunted down' and canteen cup segregation in a certain school. The thing is, I can't even remember what the issue was from the previous month. And I'm pretty sure in about two weeks' time, I'll forget there was a genius who declared that atheists don't have the right to exist in Malaysia. My point: **Is this anything in 'Malaysian socio-political media' beyond being a phone-scrolling game we can't help playing, and putting aside, and playing every week?**

In other words, could our concern with politics be simply an extension of the action bias, in that it ultimately boils down to a desire 'to be upset with something rather than nothing'? Are Malaysians hard-wired to crave for political sensation, scandal and stupidity every hour without which we feel life isn't as worthwhile? Could we be responsible for the very bad news we curse at, by virtue of our constant attention to it? Would a sustained period away from such news be too over-bearing?

Maybe we need bold leaders to declare, heck, let's just stop doing more. Let's finish the work we have already. Complete the important tasks first and quit coming up with new initiatives. And when all is done, why not take a gratuitously long rest and nip 'work-related stress' in the butt?

Maybe teachers and parents need to stop sending their kids to tuition or 'extra classes'. Or, better yet, quit worrying about academic achievement for a second and let the natural interests, learning and inclinations of the young develop spontaneously.

Finally, for us over-enthusiastic Malaysian foodies out there, you already know the problem of makan bias (which is really the action bias in gastronomic form i.e. eat something rather than do nothing). The solution? Stop eating.

It helps.



Assistant Professor Dr Alwyn Lau is a lecturer in the Mass Communication Department, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts where he teaches Media Studies, Marketing, etc. His career includes stints in the training and management consulting sector. He is also a columnist for The Malay Mail.

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF MOSQUES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Professor Dr Nangkula Utaberta

It was a bright sunny day in a beautiful dessert city of Arabia. People were chanting the above verses of poetry together. They were mixing mud, making bricks out of it, and carrying it to a particular land. Some people were cutting date trees and trimming the leaves. Some were levelling the land. All of these were going on to establish the very first base of the newly established Islamic State. It was Masjid-an-Nabawee, the Mosque of the messenger (pbuh) of Allah in the city of Yaathrib.

The city, Yaathrib, has just received its new name Madinat-an-Nabi (the city of the Prophet) to celebrate the greatest events of its history- the arrival of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) from Makkah to Madinah. Upon arrival, the blessed messenger (pbuh) gave command to his companions for establishing the Mosque on a chosen piece of land.

As the companions were working, their leader joined them also and was carrying bricks with his (pbuh) blessed hands. So much so that his (pbuh) clothes and chest became dusty. One man came to the messenger (pbuh) and asked, "o messenger (pbuh) of Allah, I have expertise in mixing mud. Should I join the other companions to carry bricks, or you want me to do the mixing job?" The messenger (pbuh) replied, "Do in what you are best at, mix the mud, leave the carrying job for others"

Humble in its form, materials and expression, this mosque was the first university from where the first generation of Muslims graduated, and they are the best of the people in all aspects according to the messenger (pbuh) of Allah. This was also the first administrative base from where the newly established Islamic state were ruled and was the center of a new society which eventually carried the light of peace and justice from the heart of Madina to the farthest corner of the world. For the later periods, when the message of Islam reached from Andalusia (modern Spain) to east China, the Prophet's (pbuh) mosque acted as the model and ideal example for establishing Muslim communities following the footsteps of the earlier generations.



Professor Dr Nangkula Utaberta

The Mosque- then and now

From the very beginning of Islam, the lives of the Muslims revolved around the institution of mosque. The notion “beginning” refers to the time of the first prophet Adam (peace be upon him) when he set up the house of Allah at Bakkah (Makkah) according to the commandment of Allah. Proceeding generations followed this footstep too and until the last prophet Muhammad (pbuh), evidence is found that the activities of Muslim community were strongly attached with the institution of mosque. Arguments could be established regarding this statement while majority of the authentic references throughout the history supported this opinion. Scholars throughout the world in a wide range of time, unanimously agreed upon the significance of prophet’s (pbuh)

Mosque in the lives of early Muslim community during the establishment of Madinah as an Islamic state around 583 AD onward. For the contemporary studies, it could be derived from historical evidence that, the development of a Muslim community cannot be done in a holistic way (both spiritually and physically) without establishing the mosque institution as a focus for that community which must supports and serve the Muslims in their diversified issues evolved every day in contemporary modern society. When mosques can serve actively in a Muslim community, it reflects the ideal situation similar to the time of prophet (pbuh).

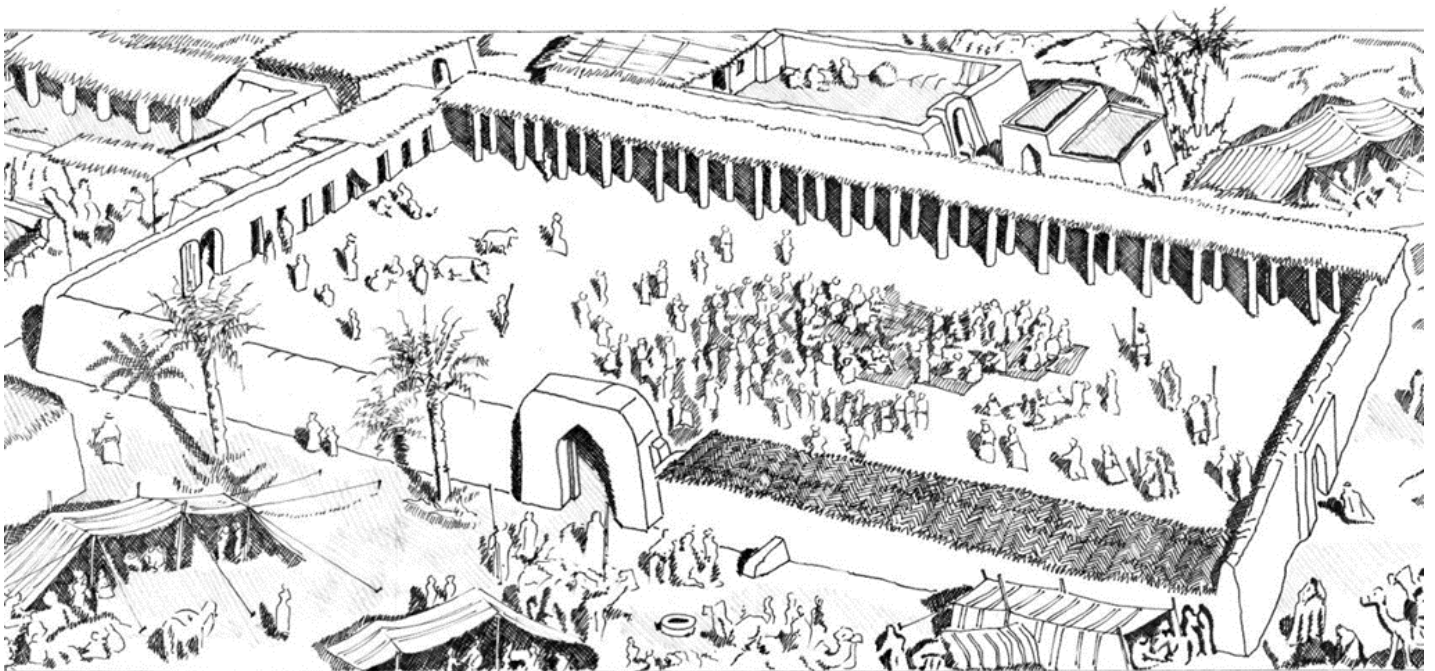


Figure 01: Prophet’s (pbuh) mosque during early years of Islamic State in Madinah (Reproduced by author according to Hisham Mortada, 2003).

Mosque is the institution which is established on a prior basis whenever a Muslim community is formed. Therefore, in contemporary Muslim settlements mosques are found everywhere. Members of the community meet in this institution on daily basis willingly for offering the obligatory prayers. This creates the opportunity for communal gatherings and social interaction which is form the basis of Muslim society. Social interaction is crucially significant to initiate developmental activities in any community. For Muslim communities, mosques have the most potential to act as the platform for social interaction. It is the inherent quality of this institution to accommodate communal gatherings as its primary function. The aim of this book is to evaluate the situation of contemporary mosques as potential community development center in the Muslim societies.

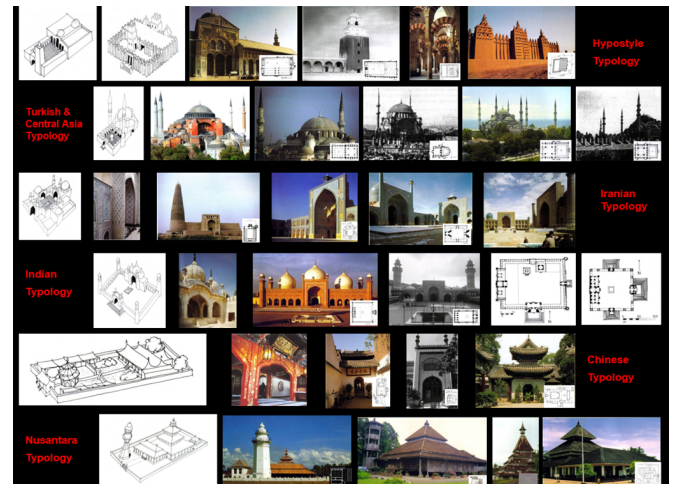


Figure 02: The development of six (6) typology of Traditional Mosques, compiled from 'The Mosque : History, Architectural Development & Regional Diversity' by Martin Frishman and Hasan-Uddin Khan (2002).

Unfortunately, the contemporary scenario is far from the ideal picture where mosques are recommended to serve as an active institution in the development of the community, in fact according to several recent scholars the situation is now completely opposite. Today's mosques lost their significance as a focal point for Muslim communities and remain merely as a place only to offer prayers and perform some religious rituals in a limited scope. The diversified ranges of activities that used to be conducted by the early generations of Muslims centering the mosque can no longer be observed in modern mosques. The mosque institution has been stripped-off of all its significant functions and left only with the function of offering daily and occasional prayers, meditation, or recitation. This work does not indicate that prayers, meditation, and recitation are not important. It attempts to suggest that these functions become more meaningful and significant in the practical lives of Muslims when mosque institutions simultaneously serve other related functions.

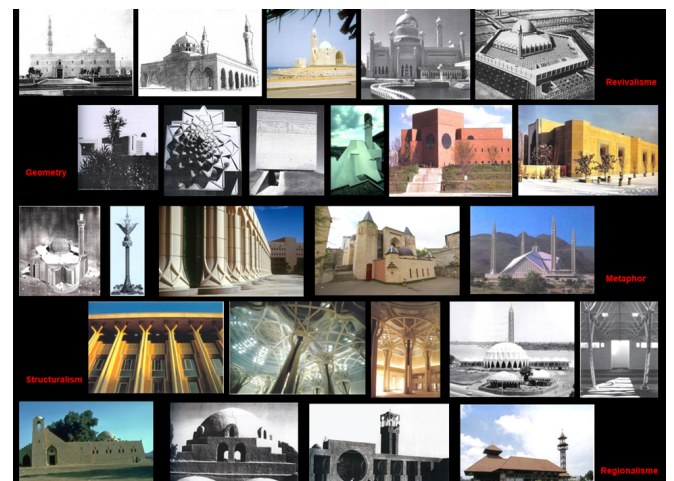


Figure 03: The typology of Modern Mosques based on their Architectural Style, compiled from The Pemikiran Seni Bina Islam Modern di Dunia & Malaysia, by Nangkula Utaberta (2014).

As stated earlier, mosques can be found in great numbers within Muslim communities. Being a public institution, it has close relationship with the lives of the community members. It can influence the lifestyle of people, make positive impact by its activity, and create harmonious society by strengthening the social bond among people. Nowadays, lots of other institutions are established to bring positive changes to peoples' lives, whereas the Muslim communities already have numerous existing mosques ready to serve this purpose. Proper utilization of these existing institutions might ensure the development of the community more effectively without even establishing separate institutions to serve this purpose. Despite this potential, today's mosques in Muslim communities are not being able to contribute to the developmental activities. This thesis aims to identify the key factors that are responsible for this situation. There are several issues which should be taken into consideration while considering the institution of mosque. These issues are social, religious, economic, and political. Without proper understanding of the current scenario of modern Muslim societies, it is not possible to identify why present-day mosques are unable to make any significant impact on the Muslim communities.

With the advancement of time, the lifestyle has changed drastically which require the scholars and academicians to re-evaluate or re-define every aspect of life for resolving contemporary issues. This is also true for Islamic studies, and it would be insufficient to try to evaluate the needs of present Muslim societies in the light of early generations of Muslim. No doubt that, we must draw lessons from the lives of early generations of Muslims but that does not necessarily imply that we follow blindly, rather it implies that we use our intellects to identify their philosophy and apply it in proper form to suit the needs of present time. This approach will ensure the flexibility that Islam offers for its followers and thus, contemporary Muslim communities will be able to resolve their issues within the boundary and teachings of Islam.

In our research we try to adopt this approach and attempted to evaluate the need of the modern Muslim societies in the light of contemporary time. Moreover, today numerous mosques, established in everywhere of Muslim settlements are under-utilized. So, the people are unable to gain proper benefits of having these institutions within their communities. This study simultaneously attempts to identify appropriate programs for reviving these mosque institutions. The findings of this study will serve several purposes. First, it will identify the reasons why people today are being detached from the institution of mosque. This would lead to the second stage where the study will discuss on probable recommendation that will relate the institution of mosque to the need of contemporary Muslim societies. Finally, an outline of appropriate programs and recommendations will be suggested that could revive the institution of mosque to contribute actively to the development of the community.

CURRENT RESEARCH GRANT CALL, EXHIBITION AND SYMPOSIUM

| No. | Funding Scheme | Endorsement by CERVIE | Submission Closing Date |
|-----|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Malaysia Grand Challenge, MOSTI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applied Innovation Fund (AIF) Technology Development 1 Fund (TeD 1) Bridging Fund (BGF) MOSTI combatting COVID-19 Fund URL link: https://edana.mosti.gov.my/ | Open, no closing date as for now | Open, no closing date as for now |
| 5 | Industry Linkage Fund (ILF) research grant from Malaysian Rubber Council (MRC) URL link: https://www.myrubbercouncil.com/industrylinkagefund/ | | |
| 6 | National Conservation Trust Fund for Natural Resources (NCTF) URL link: https://www.ketsa.gov.my/en-my/KetsaCore/Biodiversity/Pages/nctf.aspx | | |
| 7 | Research Excellence and Innovation Grants (REIG) 2 nd Call | | 31 Aug 2022 |
| No. | Exhibition(s) | Submission Closing Date | |
| 1 | MTE 2022 Sustainable Development Goals International Innovation Awards (SDGIIA) URL: https://mte.org.my/ | 17 – 21 Oct 2022 | |
| No. | Symposium(s) | Abstract Submission Closing Date | |
| 1 | Asian Federation of Biotechnology Malaysia Chapter International Symposium 2022 (AFOBMCIS 2022) Date: 18 – 21 September 2022 URL link: https://www.istr.org/general/custom.asp?page=AsiaPacific | NA | |

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