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**CONTENTS**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	1
<b>SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM</b>	3
<b>WELCOMING ADDRESS</b>	7
<b>KEYNOTE ADDRESS</b>	11
<b>Session 1 : Exposing the Meanings and Spirit of Place</b>	27
<b>Special Lecture - 1</b> Cultural Landscapes: Whose Values and Management Challenges – Visioning Asia / Ken Taylor (Australia)	29
<b>Special Lecture - 2</b> Meaning and Aesthetics of a Korean Traditional Landscape / Sung-Kyun Kim (Korea)	39
<b>Special Lecture - 3</b> Taking Background in Three Scales: The Cultural Meanings of a Community in Beijing / Shangyi Zhou (China)	47
The Role of Narratives & Storytelling in the Construction of Meaning of the Cultural Landscapes of Hong Kong / Yin Lun Chan (Hong Kong)	55
Identifying Cultural Landscape Components in the District of Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia / Mazlina Mansor et als. (Malaysia)	65
The Meaning and Spirit of Living with Water Cultural Landscape in Flood Protection Model: The Case of the Chaophraya River Basin and the Delta of Central Thailand / Ariya Aruninta (Thailand)	73
Urbanisation Impacts on Cultural Landscape Components: A Case Study of Phaikornam, Phitsanulok, Thailand / Witiya Pittungnapoo (Thailand)	83
Reviving the true spirit of Pilgrimage at Shaktipithas in Himachal Pradesh / Harveen Bhandari (India)	89
Indian Cultural Landscape vis-à-vis Ecological Cosmology: A Vision for the 21st Century / Rana P. B. Singh (India)	97
Kabuyutan, Traditional Cultural Landscape of Sundanese Community in Indonesia as a Sustainable Rural Landscape Management / Nurhayati H. S. Arifin et als. (Indonesia)	109

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Session 2: Heterogeneity vs. Homogeneity in Cultural Landscape Aesthetics</b>	117
<b>Special Lecture - 4</b>	
Envisaging the Aesthetic Profoundness of Chinese Landscape Paintings: Aspects of Poems and Ci-Poetry / Monica Kuo (Taiwan)	119
Visualizing and Interpreting Aesthetics of Global Change in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia / Tommaso Durante (Australia)	127
Transition of the gaze at Shirakawa-go / Nobu Kuroda (Japan)	135
The Typology of Enjoying the Outstanding Scenery in the Joseon Korea: In Case of Yeongnam Region / Je-Hun Ryu (Korea)	143
Meaning of a Public Place: A Story of Padang Pahlawan / Nor Z. Harun, Mazlina Mansor & Ismail bin Said (Malaysia)	151
Beyond historical commitment: The aesthetics and ideology of culture in Takarazuka Revue / Maria Grajdian (Japan)	161
<b>Session 3: Making Harmonious Path through Integrity and Co-sharedness</b>	171
Maintaining and Managing Living heritage in Zengchong Dong Village / Yinchun HE & Nobu Kuroda (Japan)	173
Cultural landscape and the concept of time in a rural farming of Nupe community in Nigeria / Isa Bala Muhammad & Ismail bin Said (Malaysia)	181
The Identity of Traditional Water-based Communities in Thailand: An Asian Cultural Route in Tourism Development / Siriwan Silapacharanan (Thailand)	187
Social Link as Cultural Landscape Heritage. The Prerequisite of Social Capital Management to any Built Environment / Alban Mannisi (France), Hideki Koizumi & Umetsu Kimio (Japan)	193
Value of Traditional Culture In Contemporary Landscape- The Case Study of The Niushoushan Zen Buddhist Culture Scenic Area of Nanjing, China / Yangyang Yuan & Yuning Cheng (China)	203
Philosophies of Community Spaces, Its Traits, Congestion and Contestation: A Case of Kathmandu City, Nepal / Sarbeswar Praharaj & Shivendu Shekhar Singh (India)	209
Urban Mobility corridors as Connectors for holistic experience at Heritage Sites: Case study of World Heritage Site of Ellora Region / Shubhada Kamalapurkar (India)	217

# **Identifying Cultural Landscape Components in the District of Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia**

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The paper aims to identify the components that exist in the cultural landscapes of the Kuala Kangsar district, Malaysia. This paper presents a part of a larger study from four disciplines in the built environment, which explore and evaluate the values of heritage components of a district in Malaysia. The aim is to characterize a 'heritage district' in Malaysian towns. Therefore, for landscape architecture discipline, the paper reviews the types of the cultural landscape component and explain them in relation to the case study site, i.e. Kuala Kangsar, a district in Perak, Peninsular Malaysia. Kuala Kangsar is a district with many historical legacies and diverse natural, tangible and intangible cultural landscapes. These include rivers, traditional Malay villages, royal town with its historic buildings, open spaces and landscape structures, and traditions which date as far back to the Malacca Sultanate era (15th century). The components are the results of the activities of the local people and their interactions with a place.

**Keywords:** Cultural landscape; components; Kuala Kangsar; values; heritage district

## **1. Introduction**

'Landscape' is an area of land that includes all landscape elements (McGarigal, 2010). Whereas, 'culture' is a way of how people live their lives, whereby the customary living of the people is passed on to the next generation (House, 1987). The landscape of a place undeniably has its cultural association. This is because human intervention and perception influence the place. It reflects an integrated pattern of human behavior — thought, speech, action and artifacts. These human behaviors depend upon the human capacity for learning and transmitting the knowledge to succeeding generations (National Heritage Act Malaysia, 2003). In addition, a place is a visually distinct landscape based on its natural features, historical uses and origin of development. The landscape of a place is a visible imprint of human activity and culture. In short, the landscape is a piece of land where interaction between human and nature occurs. The association between culture and the landscape outlines the Cultural Landscape of a place.

According to Birks et. al. (1988), the origin of the word Cultural Landscape is not clear. However, initially the concept appeared among the geographers. Since the early 1990s, Cultural Landscape has become more commonly used, especially in multidisciplinary fields of study that deals with the environment. However, the conceptual content of the word may vary according to the understanding within the study field. Nonetheless, the general understanding is that Cultural Landscape deals with the knowledge that it is a landscape where man has left his marks in some ways and also a landscape that man has a perception of it. The UNESCO (2008, p. 14) defines the Cultural Landscape as cultural properties that represent the "combined works of nature and man". The combined works express a long and intimate relationship between people and the natural environment (UNESCO-ICOMOS, 2009). It means that the landscapes and their characters develop from a human response to the natural features and systems in the environment. It defines Cultural Landscape as an illustration of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraint and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.

Cultural Landscape consists of properties in terms of sites, structures, natural features, buildings and artifacts sequentially imprinted on the landscape by activities of various human occupants. A landscape without visible sign of history is a landscape without memory or forethought (Jackson, 1985). However, Mitchell and Buggley (2000) note that Cultural Landscape is about human history, continuity of cultural tradition, social values and aspirations. The cultural landscape of a site testifies humans' creative genius, imagination, social development and spiritual vitality. Therefore, it contains invaluable information about human history and his relationship with the environment that surrounds him. It emphasizes on the interrelationship of people and the natural environment and conveys information about the processes and activities that have shaped a community. Therefore, Cultural Landscape provides people with a sense of place, and through time, it reveals the human relationship with the land. It gives a sense of place because a cultural landscape of a

place represents the heritage and a part of the life of its people and their relationships to the land. In short, they are a part of the collective identity of a place and its people.

Cultural Landscape of a place can present a vast amount of natural and cultural landscape properties. This paper refers the properties as 'components' of a place. The purpose of this paper is to identify the components of Cultural Landscape in the district of Kuala Kangsar. However, this paper presents only a portion of the findings of a study that seek to explore the components and attributes of a 'heritage district' in Malaysia. The study integrates four disciplines in the built environment: urban planning, landscape architecture, architecture, and arts and cultural disciplines. This paper is about the Cultural Landscape viewed from the landscape architecture perspective. The study identifies accumulated reviews of papers on Cultural Landscape obtained from international references and local study. The study also used data from a field study in the Kuala Kangsar district and data from literature reviews to identify various natural, tangible and intangible cultural landscape components that exist in the district. The study forms a basis of understanding the components of a Cultural Landscape for identifying the essential components and attributes of a Cultural Landscape relevant to the study and to the Malaysian context.

## **2. Cultural Landscape in Malaysia and the Components**

Cultural landscape components are essential to understand the history and culture of a place. Some components are extremely important that they need preservation and conservation. In other words, the components have heritage significance to a country and people. The protection of the 'cultural landscape heritage' can contribute to various benefits to the place and its society—for example, modern techniques of sustainable land-use and enhancement of natural values in the landscape. The UNESCO's World Heritage Centre (2003) has classified the cultural landscape heritage into the cultural heritage, natural heritage and a mixed of cultural and natural heritage. Many groups in various countries also classify the cultural landscape heritage that exists in their place. For example, the heritage components as stated in the law on National Heritage of Laos are categorized into the cultural heritage (tangible objects and intangible items), historical heritage (tangible objects and intangible items) and natural heritage (having scenic value and having scientific/ecological value) (Law on National Heritage of Laos, 2005). In Japan, the cultural landscape with heritage significance is grouped into the Cultural Properties consisting of tangible cultural properties, intangible cultural properties, folk cultural properties, monuments, cultural landscape and groups of traditional buildings (Policy of Cultural Affairs Japan, 2011).

It is worth to note that the protection of culture is not intended to freeze, preserve or stop change (Heritage Resources Centre, 2010). Rather, it is intended to help understand the value of a place, provide a framework that will help to manage environmental change of an area in the future. Thus, there exist law and regulations in many countries to protect the cultural components—such as putting restrictions on their alterations of existing states. In Malaysia, the National Heritage Act (Act 645) is an Act for the conservation and preservation of Malaysian heritage (National Heritage Department, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia, 2005). This Act was enacted by the Parliament of Malaysia, as a result from the convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 1972 and the convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2003. Other related acts in Malaysia that concern with the movable and immovable cultural heritage are the Antiquities Act, 1976 (Act 168), National Archive Act, 2003 (Act 629), Town and Country Planning Act, 1976 (Act 172). The components under the protection of the law include the national heritage, natural heritage, and tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Fundamentally, the act is in line with the classification of cultural landscape underlined by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre—that is the heritage properties are divided into two categories, which are tangible and intangible (Fowler, 2003). Tangible heritage includes natural and cultural sites, for examples, monuments, archaeological sites, and movable heritage collections, historic urban areas, vernacular heritage and cultural landscapes. Living dimensions of heritage and all aspects of physical and spiritual relationship between human societies and their environment are grouped as intangible heritage.

Figure 1 shows the summary diagram of the components that defines cultural heritage according to the National Heritage Act Malaysia (Act 645). These components are applicable for cultural landscape components in the country, as well.

Based on the description above, Figure 2 breaks down the basic classification of the cultural landscape components into its detailed descriptions. It is a schematic diagram of the cultural landscape heritage components in Malaysia as based on the analysis of various literatures. These components are derived from various literature reviews locally and internationally (e.g. National Heritage Department, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia, 2006; Policy of Cultural Affairs Japan, 2011; Law on National Heritage of Laos, 2005), which best described the components of the cultural landscape in Malaysia.

The paper will discuss the three components of the cultural landscape, i.e (a) Natural landscape, (b) Tangible cultural landscape, and (c) Intangible cultural landscape by using a case study site, namely Kuala Kangsar, which is a district in the state of Perak, Malaysia.

### **3. Kuala Kangsar**

Kuala Kangsar is a district in Perak, North Malaysia. Having breadth of 256, 360 hectares, Kuala Kangsar consists of nine sub-districts: Sungai Siput, Pulau Kamiri, Senggang, Sayong, Kampung Buaya, Chegar Galah, Lubok Merbau, Kota Lama Kiri and Kota Lama Kanan (Figure 3). It is the third largest district of Perak, after Hulu Perak and Batang Padang. However, it has the lowest population as compared to other districts in Perak. In 2010, there are 152,590 residents, and this is only 6.8% population of Perak (Kuala Kangsar Municipal District, 2011). Kuala Kangsar is bordered by Hulu Perak to the north, Kinta to the south, Larut Matang and Selama to the west and the Kelantan state to the east. It is a famous district for tourism activities because it has royal history, arts, cultural and heritage.

The history of Kuala Kangsar's opening started when the Sultan Mudzaffar Shah, the first ruler of the state of Perak who moved his administrative center from Pulau Tiga to Kuala Kangsar in 1743. This is because Kuala Kangsar is a strategic location, which is at the Perak River bank. In the 18th century, the river was very important to the city development, economically and socially, for the reason that Kuala Kangsar was the center of tin production. Between late 19th and early 20th century, the development of Kuala Kangsar was affected because of the opening of new mines in other areas such as Lembah Kinta and Larut Matang. Hence, after the First World War, the administrative center for the state was moved to Ipoh. Even though Kuala Kangsar has been built since the 16th century, but the early development started in the late 19th century with the construction of government building and residence house at Residence Hill. It is then followed by the development of government English Schools; SM Clifford (early known as Hogan School) in 1898 and Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) in 1905, mosques; Masjid Ridhwaniyah at Kuala Kangsar and Masjid Ubaidiyah at Bukit Chandan in 1917 (Kuala Kangsar Municipal District, 2001).

### **4. Cultural Landscapes in Kuala Kangsar**

Kuala Kangsar, Perak owns numerous significant natural (tangible) and cultural (tangible and intangible) landscape. To the local residents of the Kuala Kangsar district, some of the natural and cultural places are landscapes that contain much values and heritage significance. For example, the traditional human settlement and areas rich in natural biodiversity are valuable as the cultural landscape components of the district. Among the visually distinct landscape characters in the district are the royal town, traditional villages, heritage buildings and structures, natural reserves and agricultural vegetation, and scenic sites. The intangible cultural landscapes of Kuala Kangsar are the socio-cultural values of many places within the district. These components are valuable not only intrinsically, but also as tourism resources. These are the areas that tourists will visit and stay, therefore, becoming potential as heritage tourism activities.

#### **4.1. Natural Landscape**

The 'Natural Landscape' is an organically evolved landscape that reflects that process of evolution in their form and component features (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2003). The study breaks down the components into three: (a) water bodies and its corridor, (b) landform, and (c) natural vegetation. Water bodies consist of landscape features such as sea, lake, ocean, river and reservoir. Features such as the sea and rivers are strategic routes for trading especially during the early days. River is a significant landscaped property that started human civilization through settlements, transportation mode and food resources. In some cultures, sea and a river becomes a place for a religious ceremony. Landform such as mountain, hill, valley and a cave is the natural landscape that can also contain history and culture. For example, mountain relates to the myth of the place of the olden days; cave contains a history of early human settlements; hill and fort acted as a defense system; valley can be a fertile place for early human civilization and settlement. Natural vegetation such as a forest is as food resources and hunting places for early settler and native people. Vegetation can also be a symbolic place and a significant feature of how a place obtains its name. These cultural landscapes can become heritage properties if they own scenic, scientific and ecological values. For example, as categorized by the UNESCO, natural heritage having scenic value are areas with outstanding aesthetic value or pure of biodiversity such as national conservation forests, biodiversity conservation areas, natural caves, waterfalls, rapids, cascades, streams, islands, mountains, cliffs, aquatic and wild animals, lakes, marshes, canals, ponds, and others.

The most prominent Natural Landscape of Kuala Kangsar is its two rivers: Perak River and Kangsar River. In world histories, river plays a very important role, especially in connecting people and transportation. In certain countries, river is still important, despite technologies in the air and road transportation. As the significant Nile River in Egypt, so does Perak River significant to the Perak State, Malaysia. Stretching just over 406km from Perak's border with Thailand, Kelantan and Perak and ending in the Straits of Melaka, Perak River is the second longest in Peninsular Malaysia. Perak River flows from north east of Perak, Hulu Perak to Beting Beras Basah in Bagan Datoh and flows out to the Straits of Malacca. Along this river, traditional villages, ancient architectures and tombs, scenic landscapes present their own stories and mysteries. In the early days, Perak River and Kangsar River played significant roles in the district, mainly as transportation channel, thus shaped Kuala Kangsar town as it is today. In fact, the state of Perak in Malaysia originated at the edge of Perak River and

started to expand from the high water mark in Ulu Belum to its estuary in Southern Melaka. In the early days, people were attracted to the river and chose to travel through it whereby they found a good bank to land. They traveled by sampan to the stream of the Perak River whereby they found that the confluence intersection of the river was appropriate for settlement, especially with the low banks, fertile land and scenic view. They were the explorers who came to open new lands, interacted with the native people and become settlers and local people in Perak (Kuala Kangsar Municipal District, 2011). This waterway became the focus of political, cultural, social and economic activities. **Perak River is also special for its Royal Stature.** This river is central to the history and traditions of Perak Sultanate and the people. The waters are part of royal ceremonies including the inauguration of a new Sultan.

In the 19th century, the river played a crucial role in transporting the ore. The discovery of tin also contributed to an economic boom. Many major towns of Perak situated along the river. They include the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Manong, Teluk Intan and Bagan Datoh. The first rubber trees in the country were planted on the riverbank. It is a significant tree that changed the course of Malaysia's economy in the early 1900's. Now, the first rubber tree is situated outside the gates of the museum in Kuala Kangsar town, and it is the only tree left from nine rubber trees planted by H.J Murton on 1877. It is one of two of the oldest rubber trees in Peninsula Malaysia that have survived the years. More than 135 years old, the tree is still alive, and it marks as an icon of the rubber industry development in Malaysia. Perak River also irrigates a national paddy granary and produce hydropower for the nation. There are four hydropower dams straddling the Perak River at Temenggor, Bersia, Kenering and Chenderoh. Chenderoh hydropower dam is the nearest to Kuala Kangsar town. Canoe expeditions are a regular feature along the Perak River and boat rides are the daily experience of the local people and tourists. Several picnic sites can also be found in scenic riverside spots, and jungle trekkers enjoy the lovely waterfalls at the upper-forested reaches. The Perak River is today an active part of the lives of the people of Perak as well as tourists. All in all, Perak River is a working river rich in biodiversity containing a wide spectrum of functions and a Natural Landscape that is cherished by the people.

#### 4.2. Tangible Cultural Landscape

'Tangible Cultural Landscape' is the most easily identifiable cultural landscapes. It is a clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man (World Heritage Centre, 2003). Some of the examples of Tangible Cultural Landscape are villages, parks, gardens, open spaces, main streets, neighborhoods, cemeteries, trail ways, monumental buildings and industrial complexes. The landscape components also consist of cultural heritage values with aesthetic qualities. It is also called designed landscapes, as well as associative landscape. The Tangible Cultural Landscape in this paper refers to two main components: Open Spaces and Landscape Structures. Both are designed landscapes consisting of places such as botanic gardens, arboretum, public parks and squares, residential, domestic, institutional, commercial, industrial and productive designed landscapes (E.g. Kitchen gardens, orchards, nursery) and commemorative landscapes (E.g. Cemeteries, memorial trees). It is also an associative landscape that relates to historical events. For example, in Malaysia padang is a vast green open space that is located in many old towns. It is valuable in terms of historical significance because it exists from the colonial time. Some open spaces are valuable because they are the grounds of historic buildings situated within the area. Landscape structures consist of monuments and structures resulted from the combined work of man and nature. For examples, they consist of architectural works, monuments and sculpture for groups of buildings that have outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science.

Kuala Kangsar district has a royal town character. Kuala Kangsar has a very clear image as royal town and heritage because of the royal buildings and twenty heritage buildings and tombs listed in the National Heritage Department. Most of the buildings in this town are almost or more than 100 years (Kuala Kangsar Municipal District, 2011). Its Open Spaces and Landscape Structures consist of components that relate to the history and tradition of the Perak Sultanate, as well as the influence of colonialism. The Tangible Cultural Landscape includes open spaces of historical buildings, playfield, royal palace grounds, royal piers, pavilion, market, bridges, clock tower and tombstones (Figure 4). There are also open spaces, which are located within the grounds of the old government buildings, post office, hospital, Ubudiah mosque, Ridzuaniah mosque and the open playfield of the Malay College Institution. Padang is a historic place that is located in between the Municipal District Office and the Police Headquarter, which is frequently used for activities by local people. Across the road from the playing field of the Malay College, sits the Pavilion Square Tower. Built in 1920, this small pavilion of 3-tiers were designed for the Royal families and dignitaries for polo games. Distant landmarks of the town are the Victoria Bridge (built in 1890s), Sultan Iskandar Bridge and Sultan Abdul Jalil Bridge that connects Kuala Kangsar with Sayong, a traditional village rich in a cultural landscape. In the town center, an old Clock Tower is a landmark to orientate residents of the old and new towns.

#### 4.3. Cultural Landscape and Intangible Cultural Landscape

Tangible Cultural Landscape also consists of one component with the term 'Cultural Landscape'. Cultural Landscape is a continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2003). It is closely associated with the traditional way of life in which the evolutionary process is still in progress. At the

same time, it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time. Cultural Landscape contains sites associated with people and their culture. These include land of agriculture, e.g. paddy field, rubber and palm oil plantation. It also consists of traditional villages (i.e. the Malay villages) where the villagers practice a traditional way of life for their livelihood and economic growth. Thus, the association between man and nature has shaped the landscapes and defined the characteristic of the place that it is associated. Due to this association, the Cultural Landscape is closely related with the components of "Intangible Cultural Landscape". In Malaysia, Intangible Cultural Landscape refers to practices, representations and expressions of knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated within the community, groups and individuals recognized as part of their cultural heritage (National Heritage Act, 2005). The Intangible Cultural Landscape components are manifested in terms of oral, traditions and expressions, language, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events. Knowledge and practices of traditional craftsmanship are also an Intangible Cultural Heritage component. These acts are passed from one generation to another, and if they contain an outstanding value to the community from a cultural point of view, they are of heritage significance.

Landscapes formed by the activities and culture of local people are indispensable for understanding the cultural landscape in Kuala Kangsar. The traditional way of life is still maintained in some of the villages. The Cultural Landscape and the Intangible Cultural Landscape are evident in sites such as Sayong, a little village across the bank of Sungai Perak. Sayong is bordered by Kota Lama Kiri and Kota Lama Kanan at the north, Kinta at the east, Senggang at the south and Kampung Buaya at the west Kuala Kangsar (Refer Figure 3). It is very synonymous with 'Labu Sayong', an earthenware container that was developed in the area since long ago because it was found that the clay from the river banks is most suitable for pottery work. Labu Sayong is an art of earthenware making that involves shaping of clay, which is then printed with various designs, smoked and then baked to form a handicraft which is useful, beautiful and unique. It is believed that the earthenware keeps the water cooler, or even has healing powers. This traditional art has been around for many years, and this industry is still very much alive in Sayong and become a source of economic livelihood of its local people (Figure 5). There are more than 12 villagers who are involved in this business. Most of them are from Kampung Kepala Bendang, Kota Lama Kanan, Kampung Bukit Lada, Kuala Sayong and Sayong Lembah.

Another site that is rich in Cultural Landscape and Intangible Cultural Landscape is Bukit Chandan in the sub-district of Sayong. Several important buildings with history and aesthetic values and structures are located on the hill of Bukit Chandan such as Iskandariah Palace, the Ubudiah Mosque, Royal Gallery and other historical buildings were built on the hill. The hill is a low density residential area with road network that follows the original topography of the land. Thus, it is suitable for the position and the environment of the palace. Nearby Bukit Chandan, there is a village named Kampung Padang Changkat that is rich with Cultural Landscape and Intangible Cultural Landscape. This is where the Gold Thread Embroidery or in Malay known as 'Tekat Benang Emas' is being practiced by the villagers. The Malay art of embroidery is centuries old with a distinctive identity. Perak is one of the few states in Malaysia that has a strong tradition in this refined art. Historical records reveal that the Malay art of embroidery has its roots in 15th century Malacca. This tradition is kept alive by a select group of women who have mastered the refined art who live in Kampung Padang Changkat. Its beauty and origins can be traced back to the royal palace. The gold embroidery is produced from shaped layers of paper and stitching gold thread over card templates in order to create raised relief on velvet cloth. Gold embroidery pieces are traditionally used in pillow cases, bed spread, cushion covers, handbags and slippers, usually donned as wedding decoration and bridal adornment. Hundreds of years ago, only the occupants of royal households could afford to have those items which had been embossed with golden patterns and designs. Nevertheless, the gold thread embroidery eventually found its way into the homes of the ordinary folks as those who have studied the embroidery art started their own business to cater for the growing demand. In the old days, the embroidery art used real gold thread which was imported from France. However, in recent years the price of gold has gone through the roof. In the absence of real gold, golden thread has become increasingly common. Since the embroidered products have limited uses, today these items are mainly found at Malay weddings, engagement ceremonies, religious rituals, birth occasions and in royal palaces. This embroidery art is the proud heritage of the Malay community (New Straits Times, 2012). Another craft in Kampung Padang Changkat that is famous to local people and tourists is the Keris making. This craftsmanship is known in Malay as 'Pandai Keris' or 'Pandai Besi'. This art is rarely seen in any other places in Malaysia.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

This research explores the significance of the cultural landscape in a Malaysian district. The documentation of the cultural landscape components in the Kuala Kangsar district will be integrated with data from three other disciplines in the built environment which later may support consideration of the district as an important 'heritage district' in Malaysia. Cultural landscape components in Malaysia are valuable; thus it is in need of protection. The protection of the cultural landscapes can safeguard traditional cultures of a place and preserve the traces of those which have disappeared too. The site that is protected and care is a 'Cultural Landscape Heritage' site, which is a geographical area of heritage significance that has been modified by human activities and is valued by a community. The protection of the cultural landscape is

intended to help understand the value of a place, and provide a framework that help to manage environmental change in Malaysia in the future. In Malaysia, the National Heritage Act (Act 645) provides the conservation and preservation of Malaysian heritage. Cities such as Melaka and Georgetown and its buildings with heritage significance have been conferred as heritage sites so that the heritage values can be preserved and conserved for future generation. However, the effort to protect the significant cultural landscape components in Malaysia should be rigorously carried out because their significance is still receiving little attention by the authorities and people. As a result, this poses a complex pressure on the land and threatens the existence and qualities. Thus, revitalization and conservation of the cultural landscape heritage are important because it will broaden the current management system and ensure stewardship of the urban landscape. Thus, it is timely that not only the heritage buildings are looked after, but also the cultural landscape sites.

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FIGURE

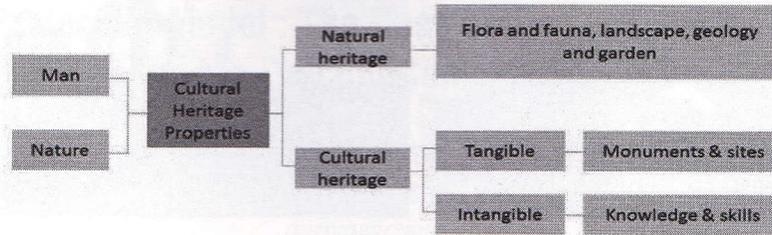


Figure 1. The Classification of cultural heritage properties according to National Heritage Act Malaysia, 2005 (Act 645)

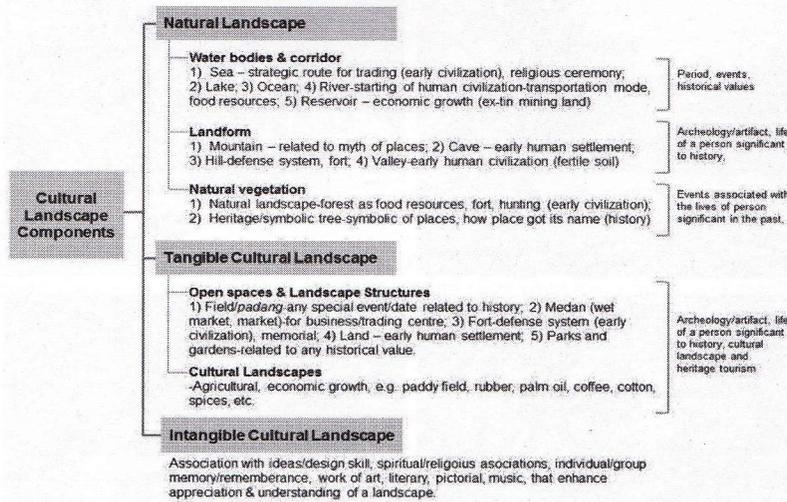


Figure 2. A schematic diagram of the cultural landscape heritage components in Malaysia

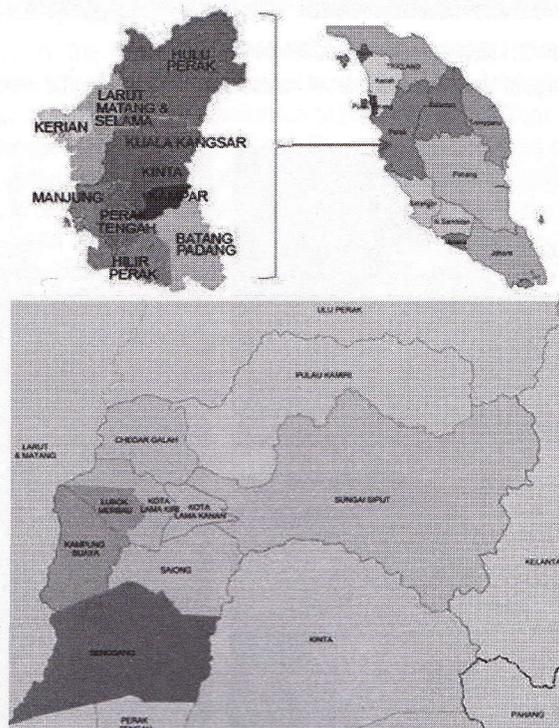


Figure 3. The location of Kuala Kangsar District in Peninsular Malaysia (Source : Kuala Kangsar Municipal District, 2001)

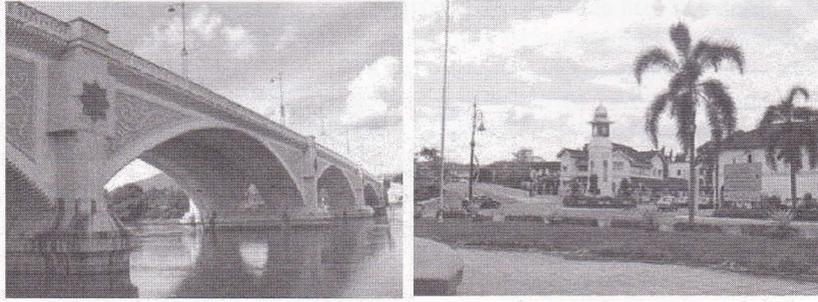


Figure 4. Tangible cultural landscape (Open spaces and landscape structures), e.g. Sultan Abdul Jalil bridge and clock tower

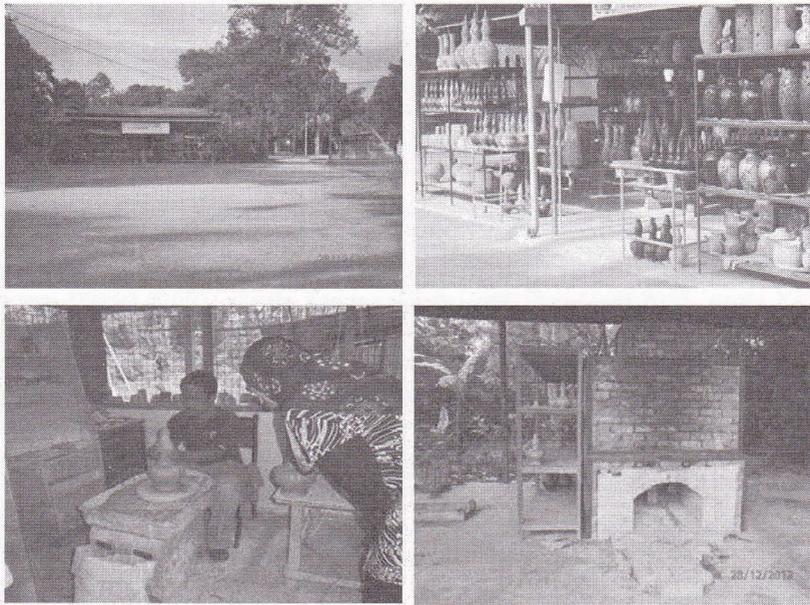


Figure 5. Cultural Landscape and Intangible cultural landscape : Village of Sayong and the art of earthenware making (Source: Field study, 2012)

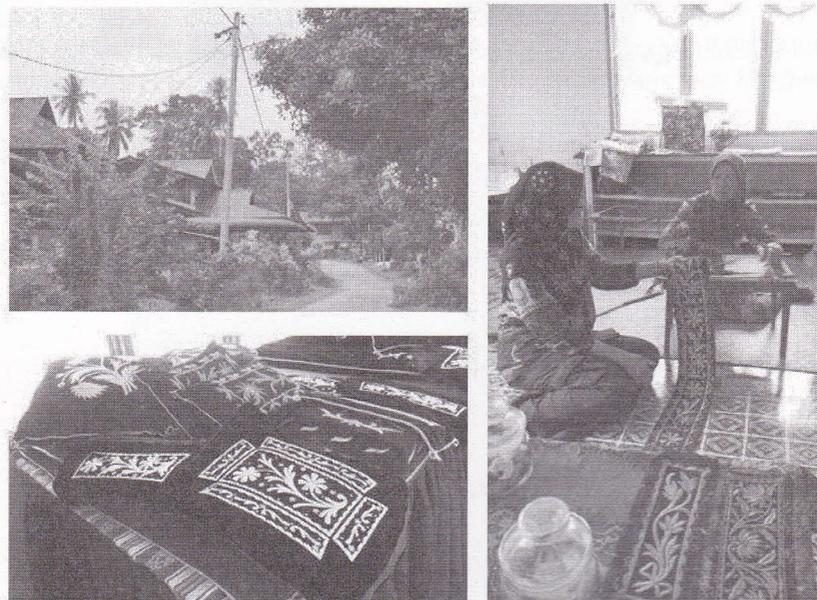


Figure 6. Cultural landscape and intangible cultural landscape: Village of Kampung Padang Changkat and the art of gold thread embroidery (Source: Field study, 2012)