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'Bergendang' and Its Spatial Use in Traditional Sarawak Malay House

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Abstract

Bergendang is a uniquely Sarawak Malay traditional entertainment frequently held during social gatherings at home. This paper investigates the spatial use of *bergendang* activity in traditional Malay houses along the Sarawak River in Kuching. The research employed a qualitative case study design approach through field study observation and semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed different spatial use of *bergendang* for early and later model of Sarawak Malay houses, which is also associated with social status of house owners. Spatial study on traditional Malay houses in other parts of Sarawak is recommended for constructing northern Borneo region's vernacular Malay house framework.

Keywords: bergendang; Sarawak Malay; spatial use; traditional Malay house

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1.0 Introduction

The Federation of Malaysia is divided into two regions with the Malay Peninsular in the west and Sarawak and Sabah in the east- on Borneo Island. The Malay is the ethnic majority of the country, living among other ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Indians, and various other indigenous people. Sarawak, located in northwest Borneo, comprises a heterogenous population with 27 ethnic groups living under its umbrella. The Malays encompassed 25% of the state population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), making them the second largest ethnic group in Sarawak after the Dayak. A common misconception, and often the main reason for the neglect of Sarawak Malay studies, is that Malays in Malaysia are "the same everywhere." Collins (2002) posits that "*Bureaucratism, orientalism and exoticism made the study of the Malay language and culture a low priority in the hierarchy of colonial endeavours*". He further asserts that the population of Borneo, as understood by nineteenth-century British and Dutch colonial officials, were either Malays or non-Malays. The non-Malay groups of Borneo were considered more 'exotic' and thus worthier of further investigation. Their earlier encounters with the Malay race throughout the archipelago, on the other hand, made the study of this ethnicity less fruitful. It is therefore not surprising that the architectural study of the Sarawak Malays still receives little attention even in present times.

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