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Surveying on the cultural approaches for the Melaka Malay houses

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Abstract

The architecture of Malay traditional houses is unique and has attractive features. One can see that all these features are not only functioning as ornamentation, but it relates to the Malay lifestyle which include religion and their culture. The early design of the Malay house was resulted mainly to the responsive climatic. If we look further detail, the Malay traditional house can be categorized according to the origin of the Malaysia states. The obvious differences of each state show the distinct creativity and skills of the locals in fulfil the need of their local culture.

The traditional house is believes as the early architecture to the Malays. They built the house as a shelter and safety reason. Thorough times, it changes and develops with the inclusions of outside influences. The incoming of different religion to their lives changed their life as well as their culture and believed. Each influence enriches the architecture of the house itself. This traditional house is a symbol and pride of the Malays as it reflects the people in Malay archipelagos.

Nowadays, traditional Malay houses are still developing from the impact of times. The influence of modern western architecture is seen diminishing the traditional elements in Malay houses. The Malay traditional house had become extinct and only some of them still remain. Luckily at some houses, the uniqueness and the specialties of Malay traditional house still can be seen.

The study of this research will look into the Malay traditional houses in Melaka Tengah District and

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are located within the state of Melaka, Malaysia and within only a few minutes from the town centre. The research will be touched into four categories, which are: 1. The origin of the Malay house. 2. Physical, psychology and geography aspects of the traditional house. 3. The house form and spatial element such as the layout plan and its relevant to the selected study houses. 4. A study on ornamentation, carving, motifs and the significant means of it as one of the special feature in this heritage architecture. On this paper, the study on selected Malay traditional houses in Melaka are a residence of Puan Kasmah Yassin at Km 6, Perigi Hang Tuah and a residence of Haji Bujang Siam at No. 861, Perigi Hang Tuah, Km 6, Kampung Duyong.

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1. Objectives, Scope & Methodology

This research study is having several objectives in order to define in achieving the enriched content of the research. Those are to learn how to appreciate the uniqueness and the specialties of the Malay traditional house in Melaka. Also to understand the architecture features in Malay traditional houses and their relation with the Malays, culture and lifestyles. Next the research objective is to learn about the Malay architecture and its contribution to our culture and heritage. Finally, the paper will investigate the revolution and its influences to the changes of Malay traditional house in Melaka through time.

The scope of this research is to focus on the issues, which are to examine the physical aspect of the traditional house such as the layout plan and its relevant to the selected study houses. Next, the scope is to narrow the study into the ornamentation, carving feature, motifs and the significant means of it. Lastly, the paper focusing on to further understands on the origin of the Malay house.

Methodology in doing this paper can be classified into four. First is on the aspect of research design which to provide a brief description of the research methods that will be used. Next is to view natural observation to study the environment habits. Lastly on this category is to do the questionnaire/interview in order to get people/occupant response. The second part on the method is to do the case study/samples. This method is by identifying the target samples of the study and next to describes and makes comparison of chosen samples.

2. Definition of the Malay House

As this research is about the houses of the Malay, this part of the research will touch briefly into the early relationship between the house and the human that is the Malays, which lead to the architecture and construction of Malay traditional house. It include their culture, believe and geographical aspects.

Firstly, we will look into the Malay house from anthropological aspect and definition. 'What is meant by a Malay house? The word Malay itself does not have any one meaning. To describe a house as Malay
because it is designed, built, owned or inhabited by Malays, is inaccurate because one may find non-Malays designing, building, owning and even inhabiting Malay houses.

Next, the incoming of Islam had separated the Malays into two groups, the Muslims and non-Muslims and creates different identities in terms of language and religion. Now, the Malays in Peninsula Malaysia consist mostly ethics coming from Acheh, Batak, Minangkabau, Jawa, Bugis and the native; Orang Asli. House or *rumah* in Malay is the oldest Malay word and has different meanings. In Jawa it is called *omah*, *umah* in Bali, *ruma* among the Dayak, *balai*, *bala* or *fale* in Fiji, *emah* in Sunda and a lot more. It is also interprets as a west place which mean precisely in west, not in Southwest or Southeast. This word also means *temassan* that is curing people, which cause by the ghost.

3. Cultural Analysis of Pn Kasmah Yassin House

The house was built by Encik Yassin 60 years ago. It is located at Km 6, Perigi Hang Tuah, Melaka. It can be categorized as *rumah berbandung tiga* as it has sixteen columns. The roof form is *bumbung panjang* (long roof). Spatial design consists of serambi, *rumah ibu*, *selang*, four bedrooms and kitchen with no *anjung*. Additional kitchen had been constructed 20 years ago at the back of old kitchen. Thus, the function of old kitchen had changed to *rumah tengah*. The toilet is outside the house separated from the bath and washing area. Using simple form, this house very much reflects the traditional house in Melaka although there are new elements introduced.

![Fig.1. The residence of Puan Kasmah Yassin](image1)

The house is a combination of timber and concrete clearly show the influence of the western in architecture. Even though the roof is no longer using natural material, expose timber structure still can be seen inside the house. The change of levels between *selang* and *rumah tengah* signifies the different spaces without using wall. Partitions are only use in private rooms like bedrooms. The wall was constructed using vertical and horizontal *papan berlidah* technique. Beneath the house is a space for storage (*kolong*).

![Fig.2. Notice the different technique of wall construction, level, window types and balustrade. *Kolong* is use as storage](image2)
Unlike old traditional houses in Melaka, this house has a very simple stair at main entrance. The odd five steps were constructed using concrete with no decoration. The same goes for selang and kitchen entrance with three steps. The simple stairs complement with simple but beautiful wood carving on balustrades, para, with ventilation holes and roof. The direct pierce wood carving gives better natural ventilation and lighting. Flower motives in pola pemidang enhance the aesthetic value of the ornamentation.

![Flora motifs on para](image)

**Fig.3.** The flora motifs on para are excellent for ventilation. It also can be found above the window

The serambi is a bit closed with half of it covered with wall and full-length windows while half of it surrounded by balustrade. The unpainted wall expresses the honesty of material and very common in traditional Malay house. Additional of the painted blue and yellow colours emphasizes the beauty of balustrade. Combination of green colour and carving enhance the para and gives a dominant look from the outside. The compound is an open area with no fence just like a typical Malay village.

4. Cultural Analysis of Haji Bujang Siam House

This house is located at No. 861, Perigi Hang Tuah, Km. 6, Kampung Duyong, Melaka. It was built in 1961 with total cost about RM 5,000. This house has twelve columns and can be categorized as rumah berbandung dua with bumbung panjang (long roof) type. Haji Bujang had decided to paint the front of the house in colorful and bright colors, which is not a norm in typical traditional Malay house. However, the combination of yellow, purple and pink had succeeded in enhancing the old house. Although colors are seldom used, there are four colors, which quiet important to the Malays, yellow, white, black and red. Each has several different meaning.

![House of Haji Bujang Siam](image)

**Fig.4.** The residence of Haji Bujang Siam
The house comprises of serambi, anjung, rumah ibu, rumah tengah, two bedrooms and kitchen. The difference of this house with typical traditional Malay house is it does not have selang. The rumah tengah had taken over the function of selang where women's guests will be entertained here. A seat was build outside rumah tengah for visitors. Another interesting feature is there is a well inside the house. The well is actually outside the house but to give some privacy, it was covered for more convenience. This is where all the wet and drying activities are carried out.

Modern materials were use to construct the house, such as concrete, timber and zinc. The front wall was constructed using timber arranged in vertical and the back of the house in horizontal. Space under the house or kolong is used as storage. This house has five steps of stair with square shape decoration. Based on the year it was construct, people more attracted to spend their money on other part of the house rather than the front stair. This shows the change of attitude and mind among the Malays as time travels. The changes of levels still remain as space divider.

Anjung in front of the serambi (can consider as veranda) gives the sense of traditional space where the occupants still can have a chat in the evening with the passerby. Surrounded by open compound with fruit trees as barrier, it is always convenience to pay Haji Bujang an informal visit. The serambi had been divided in to two areas; open and close area. The closed serambi had turned into a living room with more privacy. Full-length windows provide natural ventilation and good view to the outside. The wood carving indeed beautifies the house even more. Combination of geometrical form and flower motives on pola bujang decorates the balustrade, para (kitchen shelf) and roof. Simple but yet attractive is what one can see.
5. Conclusion

The study of selected houses shows different types of traditional Malay house in Melaka. Although there are new elements had been injected to suit the different need and the change of lifestyle, the characteristic and uniqueness of traditional Malay house still can be seen. Different design and spatial arrangement can be seen from these houses. It clearly shows the knowledge and skills of the local carpenters (tukang kayu) and crafters.

The age of the houses determine the richness of traditional elements in a house. More thought and consideration were given on details such as ornamentation and construction in older houses. A more simplified design can be seen in later traditional houses. It is due to several factors including the lack of skills of tukang kayu, expensive materials and workmanship, time as well as little appreciation of this heritage.

This initial evaluation on the selected two Melaka Malay traditional houses provides suggestion on the key aspect of the place-making turn in calculates the sense and essence of a place within the local environment. The relationship between the culture, religion and the environmental aspects of the Nusantara tropical climate play an important role in expressing the unique characteristics of the Melaka Malay houses as an important cultural asset which is unavailable in other part of the world.

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