

## **THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSE DESIGN IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Heritage is an item needs to be preserved. Malay traditional house has been slowly faded from the Malaysian development since its independence in 1957. Malay traditional house is one of the most unique house designs that can be found in Asia. It is Malay’s heritages that are very important to be preserved and conserved. The significant of Malay traditional house is selected as a reference is that traditional house is closely related with Malaysia as a whole and thus become an iconic identity. Most houses were built of timber construction using the Malay’s traditional carpentry experts because they are the pioneer in this type of construction. That is why it is no wonder that the best architectural house design using timber is Malay’s traditional timber house. It is hoped with this reference and analysis of this type of house will make a better house design for future generation and what can be learned from the ‘natural wisdom’ of the original Malay traditional house carpenters. In 2008, the numbers of recorded well preserved and conserved Traditional Malay House is declining. Thus, it is very worrying that their numbers will be lower in future and becoming extinct. Only some few efforts either by individuals or governments will try to maintain and contain this physical heritage. It is crucial that without enough join effort of those who are afford to have and maintain the house only will sustain the heritage and thus the Malaysian identity.

### **KEYWORDS:**

*Traditional, Malay, Malaysian, Identity, House, Design, Architecture, Heritage, Conservation,*

### **THE TYPOLOGY OF MALAY HOUSE**

Malay house in Peninsular Malaysia can be categorized into 5 types. These 5 types of Malay house style design can be found in Malaysia. This research will classified each type of houses and elaborate each types in its details visible characteristics. Each type has its own function and application in the Malay traditional culture and practice:

1. Istana or Castle
2. Rumah or House
3. Masjid or Mosque
4. Wakaf or Gazebo
5. Banting Padi or Rice House

Rumah or House is categorized as the people’s shelter and are the most built and can be found in Peninsular Malaysia. It can be categorized into 4 styles that will be discussed in 4.4 of this chapter. Each style has its own characteristic and design that are distinguish from one another.

### **THE BASIC MALAY TRADITIONAL HOUSE**

The basic Malay Traditional House consists of features that suits with the culture, lifestyle and climatic response (Figure 3). One of the most recognizable of the Malay Traditional house feature is the ‘*Attap Pitch Roof*’ that is made from natural materials. It responded successfully to the climate of tropical country through filtering the heat from sunlight and at the same time disperses heat from inside the house through cross ventilation at ‘*tibar layar*’.

Coconut tree are among the most commonly used in the Malay Traditional House because it permit more cross ventilation through the skyline of the house and source of food, implements, construction and as well as fuel.

Basic Malay Traditional House also is built on raised level or stilts that avoid floods and dangerous animals. It also provides privacy to the occupants. The raised floor also indirectly creates sense of different zone between the exterior and interior. In climatic response, this also catches winds on higher velocity. This design will also prevent the heat coming from the ground (conduction) to the interior floor of the house.

Underneath the raised floor, the Malays normally used it for storage of their daily activities equipment and materials such as '*sampan*', '*padi*', coconut leaves, bicycle implements and others. It is a space that is sheltered from heat and therefore also activity area such as product making space such as leaf weaving area.

The compound is used for drying materials such as drying salted fish, laundry attires and others. It is also used as a space for social interaction and work. Children use the compound as playground.

The barrier of each unit of Malay traditional house can be as simple as fruit tree (eg; '*rambutan*' tree) and shrubs because the Malay believes usage of fence can be anti-social and no neighborhood spirit. The utilities of Malay traditional house using a very simple system solution. The drainage waste water from kitchen are drained and soaked into the sandy ground.

The '*Jitra toilet*' outside the house (as toilet are the considered as unclean space to be inside the house) is using pour-flush toilet system and easily to build and maintain. The well outside is for washing clothes, bathing and drinking. It is fenced with coconut leaves as privacy barrier and covered with concrete slabs as pavement. In short, the Basic Malay Traditional house comprises of unique features that suits the culture, lifestyle and climatic response of the Malays. It is the best solution, therefore the best setting for the previous way of life of the inhabitant that uses it.

## **METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

The research combines all the data collection from various institutions that conducted architectural measured drawings by the students. All the documentation is been studied and picked up to be classified and detailed as for the documentation of the research. Then the findings are presented in papers and journals for the exposure to the public.

## **THE MALAY TRADITIONAL HOUSE STYLES**

The Malay Traditional House is divided into 4 styles as mentioned by 1 Zulkifli Hanafi on Malay Architecture (2005). Below are the styles that can be simplified from all the Malay Traditional House in Peninsular Malaysia (as shown in Figure 1, 2 & 3):

- i. Kedah Style (Kedah, Perlis and Penang State)
- ii. Perak Style (Along Perak River)
- iii. Melaka Style (Melaka, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang and Johor State)
- iv. East Coast Style (Kelantan and Terengganu)

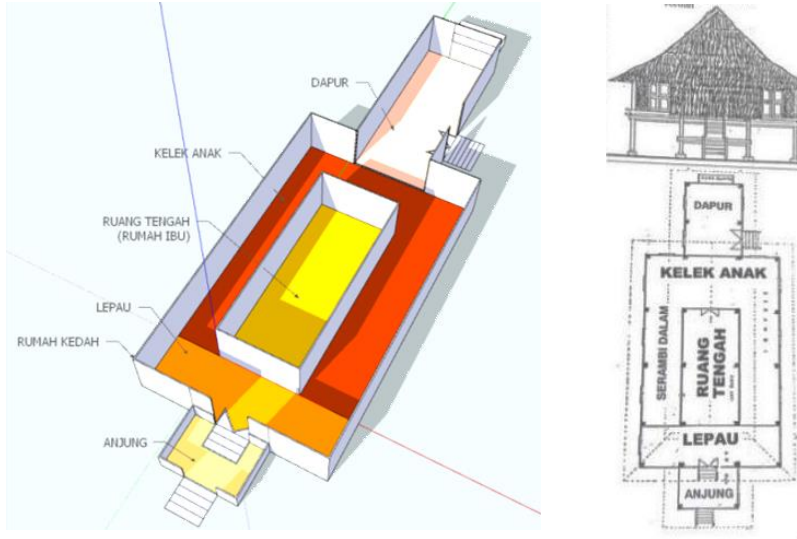


Figure 1: Divisions between Spaces in Traditional Malay House

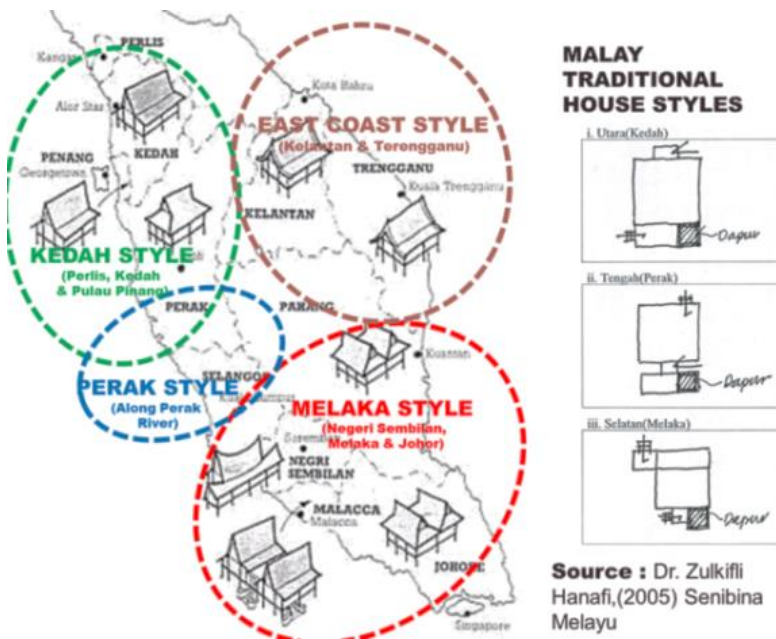


Figure 2: Malay Traditional House Styles

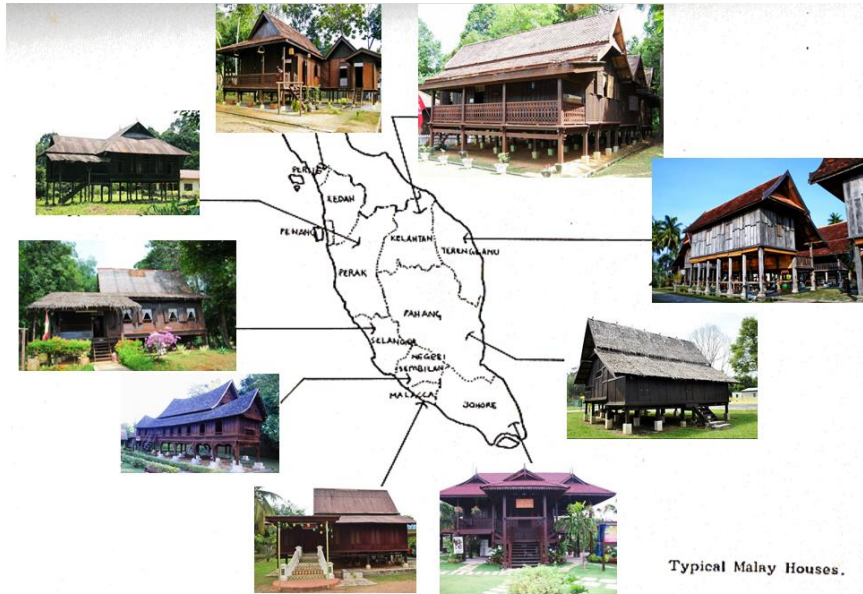


Figure 3: The Common Styles of the Malay House  
Source: Yuan, (1989), *the Common Styles of the Malay House*

### ***The Function of ‘Kelek Anak’ and ‘Selang’ of Malay Traditional House***

Malay traditional house is one of the most unique house designs in Asia. In a Malay Traditional house there is a space that is called ‘Kelek Anak’ where it became the main space for circulation especially for the sons. This is because most of the casual activities happen here together with their sons and daughters such as discussion, kite making, fishing net repairing and others. This is also the most exterior space after the main house or ‘rumah ibu’. A space called ‘selang’ or in between kitchen is dedicated for daughters and the most back space in a house. This is part of the culture and religious requirement where male and female interaction is controlled.

There is also unique features that is called ‘tingkap hendap’ or peeping window designed for the young female in the house to peek their future husband when there is a inquire delegation visit to the house. In short, these two spaces (kelek anak & selang) has separated the use of space form male and female siblings in the house and therefore is also applied in the minimum modern house requirement where there are required to be at least 3 bedrooms for parents, male & female siblings. This has become the policy of Malaysian housing development since 1980’s where it has to be followed by developers in order to commence their projects. It is a good requirement where houses with minimum 3 bedrooms are getting more satisfaction than the two bedrooms house design (2 Zakiyah Jamaludin 2010).

Traditional Malay house are built according to the needs of the Malays according to its time. Spaces are properly sequenced in orderly fashion following the ‘layer’ of house privacy in the house by visitors that are not family members. Therefore, as can be seen from the above plan, the ‘anjung’ or house lobby is the first semi-enclosed space from the house front that works as intermediate space and also the space to usher the visitors. This space is also important to separate between the most important space in the traditional Malay house that is ‘inner-room’ or the ‘mother-house’ (*rumah ibu*).

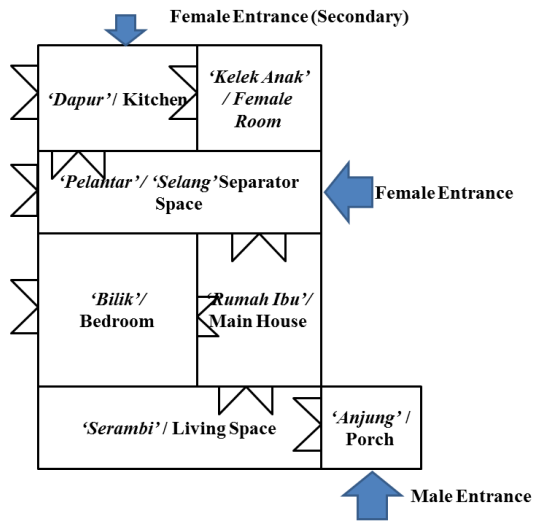


Figure 4: Divisions between Spaces in Traditional Malay House

Religious factor and culture origin was the practice since hundred years ago by the Malays. The 'intrusion' of the outsiders other than family members is segregated in a unique way in traditional house. As for situation example is when a visitor drop in to a traditional Malay house, the owner invites him or her towards the anjung and informally discusses something that is not very sensitive. But, once the conversation is getting more important or sensitive, the owner will invite the visitor for discussion in the 'serambi' of the house where the conversation continues. These shows how intricate the Malay culture on how they welcome their visitor and as a host will not also reveal their privacy of the house at the first place of an introduction.

The 'rumah ibu' is the most private space in every Malay Traditional house because it is the core of the house and also the space where parents store their savings in the house. This is also because 'rumah ibu' is also the start of a basic house until it expanded when the family becomes larger and more spaces are needed for the male and female siblings.

**Malay Traditional House Analysis**

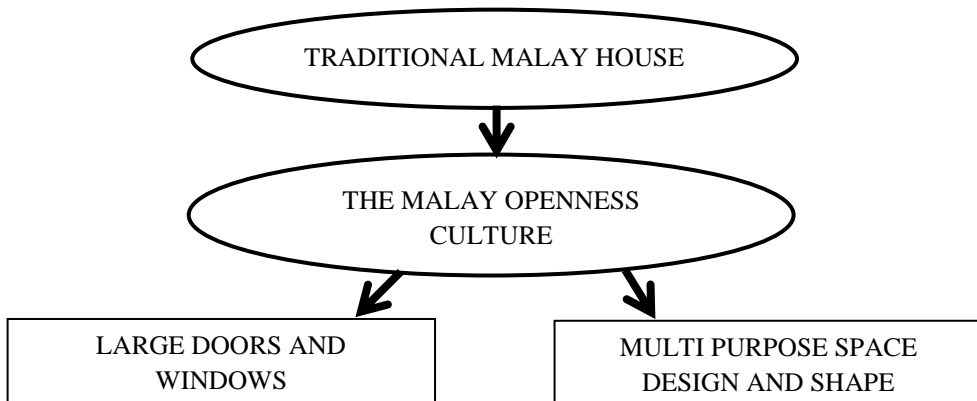


Figure 5: Malay Traditional House Design Characteristics

House decorative has not only to beautify the Malay Traditional house. It also functions as a filter, wind and ventilation channel and also symbol of a dedicated person that owns the house. For example, if the case of a house owner is a person that is a master in 'silat' martial art, there is a special carving that shape like a reverse Arabic alphabet in its wind capture carving at the top of the main entrance door (Zulkifli Hanafi, 2008). This has to do with the colonization era where the identity of the master martial art 'silat' master can only be encoded only by those who had known ledge and not by British.

There are two major identities that can be found in the Malay traditional house design which is shows the openness attribute of the Malay nation:

*i. Large doors and windows design*

Traditional Malay houses were built with large doors and windows not only to allow better ventilation and wind circulation, but also to allow the person inside and outside to interact to each other in an informal condition but still allowing privacy towards person inside the house. This also creates sense of hierarchy of knowing the barrier of outside and inside thus, also creases sense of respecting person inside the house as the owner of the house.

*ii. Multi-purpose space design*

Malays are known to have a many of their occasional celebration and festivity which occurs in the house interior such as weddings, '*doa selamat*' / prayer for safety, '*marhaban*' / religious singing and others (Nik Farah Elina, Mohd. Tajuddin M. Rasdi, 2017). Such occasion need most of the spaces inside the house (except the 'rumah ibu') to be use as different functions. Other than that during the non-occasional times, space like 'serambi' is used by man for relaxing, napping and other activities. This however, depends on the owner's wealth where he can create more expansion to the house in order to occupy these activities. This shows how flexible the Malay traditional house is.

### ***Design of Malay traditional in Malaysian House***

Malaysia is one of a developing independent country in the world that distinguishes from other countries. It has its own unique identity where multicultural, and varieties of races that form Malaysia as known by others. However, Malay tradition and culture is seen as the major origin race that starts Malaysia as it is. Therefore, the traditional Malay architecture and its tradition have becoming a strong unique race that makes Malaysia unique and recognizable. Other prominent races such as Chinese and Indian also did make Malaysia as unique multicultural nation. Therefore, in this research, additional races to be considered are the Chinese and Indian races that will be discussed in the following chapters to be digested in the consideration of Malaysian people in the proposed design of Malaysian house for family interaction.

### **CONCLUSION**

Malay traditional house is a unique and rare traditional house design that has a strong characteristic and rich background. Aspect of culture, construction, art and religion is rich and unique in its own way. Arrangement of living room (not defined in the basic Malay house space or room design) is designed well and considering of many factors of the Malay family needs and traditions. However, several weaknesses related to the house facility is proven becoming the house setback for a modern housing trend in Malaysia that needs more easy access such as proper toilet and washing area. This however determined how closely related with the house construction which is elevated from ground and also the factor of cleanliness where toilets are considered dirty area that need to be separated from house. In short, design element of traditional Malay house is a must to be considered in the design of the proposed house for family interaction for the living room because it is design in such a way is family oriented design at the first place. Design of 'kelek anak' is highly resembles the modern

definition of a living room where a lot of social activities happen on that area and it is the largest space with good lighting and ventilation for comfort.

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