

# CULTURAL HERITAGE

## The Foundation For Sustaining And Empowering Of Communal Identity

### E-PROCEEDINGS OF EXTENDED ABSTRACTS THE 1<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CULTURAL HERITAGE (ISyCH) 2021

Chief Editor

Dr. Ainul Wahida Radzuan

Editors

Dr. Nordiana Ab Jabar, Dr. Suraya Sukri, Dr. Raja Iskandar Raja Halid, Sudirman Kiffli, Siti Nur Anis Muhammad Apandi, Farrah Atikah Saari

Organised by

Department of Heritage Studies,  
Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage,  
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan  
Email: [jpwsych@gmail.com](mailto:jpwsych@gmail.com)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ISyCH2021>

## CUSTOMS AND CULTURE AFFECTING THE INTERIOR SPACE OF MALAY TRADITIONAL HOUSE

Noorul Huda Mohd Razali<sup>1</sup>, Mohammed Fadzli Maharimi<sup>2</sup>  
Department of Interior Architecture<sup>1&2</sup>  
Faculty of Architecture and Ekistics  
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan  
noorulhuda@umk.edu.my<sup>1</sup>, fadzli.m@umk.edu.my<sup>2</sup>

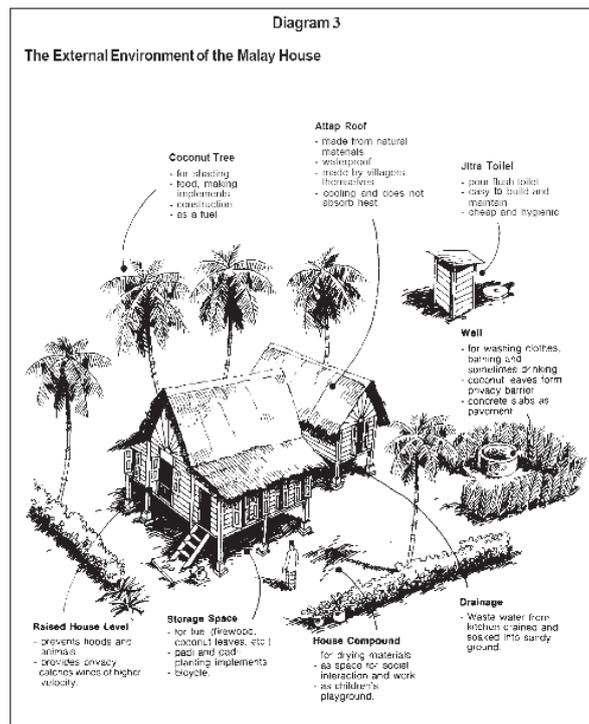
### ABSTRACT

Malay Traditional house (MTH) is heritage architecture, also known as a vernacular house where it is located far away from the city area. This house is mainly resided by the Malay people, who practices Islam, Malay cultural customs and values in their daily lives. In the earliest eras, the MTH's space was very small which particularly had only a basic main house. Throughout the times, the MTH developed from a basic house into several spaces which needed to be compatible with the Malays' basic needs, culture and their environment. MTH emphasizes on the hierarchy, segregation of the spaces and interior architectural elements. The objective of this paper is to describe the relation between Malay culture, customs and religious belief and how these elements reflect the spaces of the house. The result reveals the interior space planning provision that would assist in providing new design recommendations for modern terrace houses in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Malay Traditional house, heritage, culture, custom, segregation

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Malay houses are located on the equatorial line with humid and hot climate (Mohd Sabrizaa, 2017) with a temperature of around 22-32 degrees Celsius (Yuan, 1987). The Malay traditional house (MTH) is considered as the heritage of the Malays (Yuan, 1991) and used quality hardwood to construct the house's pillar (column), floor, wall and roof structure (Yaa'cob et al., 2021). The relation of culture and environment plays an important role in the spatial design of MTH. Different communities represent different types of culture, environment, socio-economic, religious beliefs and environmental behavior. These elements influence a house's spatial design (Rapoport, 2008), and express the cultural identity of the community and the surroundings also reveal the space behavior and utilization (Gharaei & Rafieian, 2013; Rapoport, 2008). MTH is resided by the Malays who practice Islam as their religious belief (Noorul Huda & Talib, 2013). In Malaysia, the Malay traditional house (MTH) is an example of a timber structured house that is raised on stilts above the ground level (Nasir, 1985; Yuan, 1987, 1991; Gurupiah & Ra'alah, 1998). This house type reveals the continuity of Malay cultural norms, customs, religious beliefs which are shown in the segregation and seclusion of space (Noorul Huda & Talib, 2013). The construction of MTH used wedges, mortise and built by local carpenters with the help from the local community of the villages (Yuan, 1991; Nasir, 1985; Yaa'cob et al., 2021).

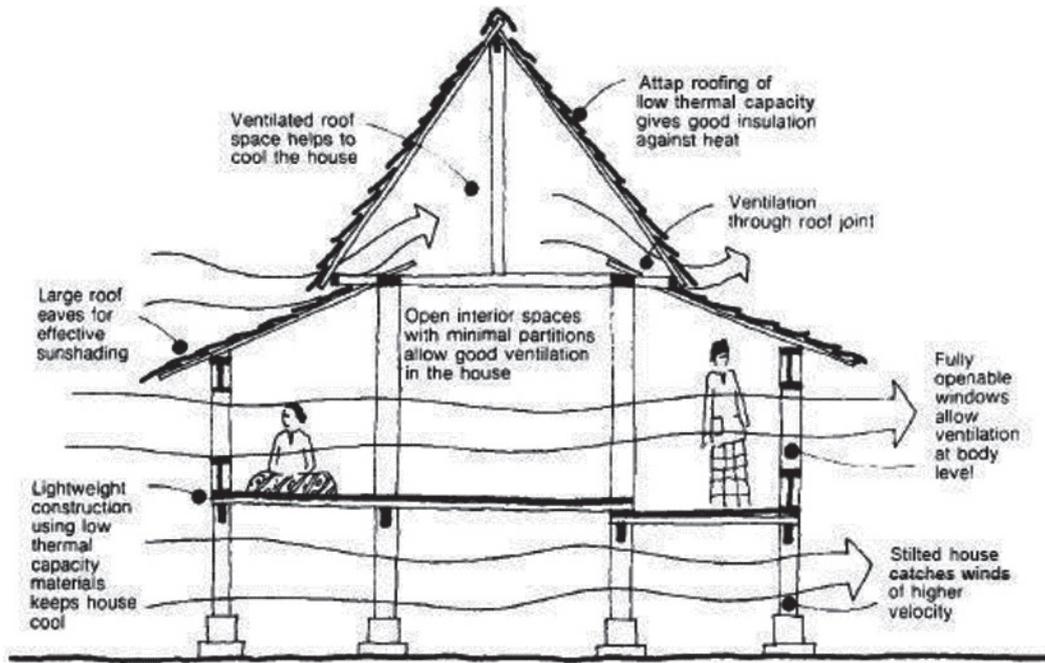


**Figure 1.** The Malay traditional house (MTH) compound.  
(Yuan, 1987)

### 1.1. The House Form of MTH

The house form will change accordingly from time to time due to the needs and lifestyles of the occupants in the house (Yuan, 1991; Abidin, 1981). Therefore, the MTH's design is built in modular concept (Siti Aisyah, 2020), which is more flexible with multi-functional space to accommodate the future needs of family growth (Yuan, 1991; Nasir, 1985; Gibbs, 1987). MTH can be moved easily from one place to another because the house is built in a modular concept. The origin and base of the MTH is the core house known as *Rumah Ibu* (main house) and is the first section built by the builder (Anuar, 2006; Mohd Sabrizaa, 2017). Later other space will be built which follows the needs of the family. *Rumah Ibu* is named in honor of women who manage the house and a mother will always supervise all interior space (Nasir & Wan Teh, 1996) and also educating her children, which are part of Malay culture.

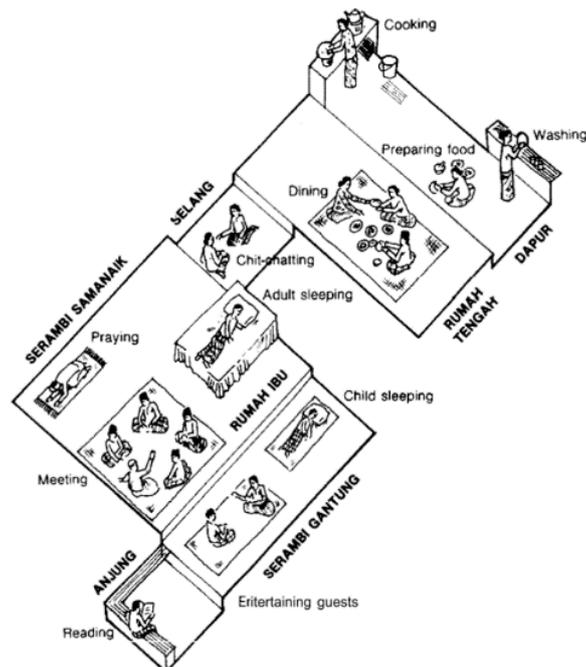
There is another heritage element as an added value for MTH, which is the rich and fine art of wood carving. The unique carved motifs are derived from the Malays' religious belief and the natural surroundings (Mohd Sabrizaa, 2009). This carvings are made using high quality wood and has become part of the aesthetic and heritage of the house (Yuan, 1987; Gurupiah & Ra'alah, 1998). Wood carving is part of the aesthetic elements and is carved by skilled local craftsmen who use motifs derived from flora, fauna, Arabic calligraphy and geometry shapes (Daud et al., 2012, Yuan 1991). Yuan (1991; 1987) and Nasir, (1982; 1985) state that MTH architectural elements consist of windows, door, lintel, staircase and the aesthetics of wood carving. The window is very large that built up from the floor level and ended up at the *tebuk tembus* (perforated hole) wood carving. These windows and *tebuk tembus* wood carvings offer ventilate the air and allow natural sunlight to get into the house to provide comfort to the occupants.



**Figure 2.** The MTH air movement.  
(Yuan, 1987)

The roof eaves above the large window and will help to transmit the heat and also controls the glare from natural sunlight, direct solar radiation and protects from the heavy rain. The roof eaves with fascia board that extended in front of the window that will help to minimize an outsider's view of house's interior (Yuan, 1987).

## 1.2 MTH space relationship



**Figure 3.** Interior spaces of MTH.  
(Yuan, 1987; 1991)

The MTH gives a vast impact of lifestyle for the occupants in the house (Ghaffarianhoseini et al., 2014). Yuan (1987), Nasir, (1985) and Rapoport, (1969) mention that a house is a place where a person should feel safe, peaceful, comfortable, tranquil and as his or her private sanctuary. Residents could do lot of activities with family members that can strengthen their relationships which is also in alignment to their religious belief (Mortada, 2003; Omer, 2010), customs and culture. According to Gurupiah & Ra'alah (1998), Nasir (1985), Yuan (1987) and Nasir & Wan Teh (1996) the MTH has multi-functional space with different activities which means it will change due to daily activities and certain festivities (e.g. family gathering, wedding feast, Raya feast, *doa selamat* feast, social function and religious function). This is highlighted by Rapoport (2008) where there is continuity in the role of the cultural environmental. The space's functions will change at different times of the day and night and it is shown in their daily activities. The minimal use of partition in the interior is to allow the space to be more flexible. Even though there is less partition in the space, it is replaced with the use of curtains to block the outsiders from viewing the private area (Yuan, 1987). Culturally, the Malays will sit on the wooden floor because there is very minimal furniture namely sofa or dining table, which will be placed in the interior of the house.

The MTH is divided into two areas where it is known as front and back areas. Front house will be a place for males and females will be placed at the back of the house. The front part area is more public rather than back area where it is more private and is meant only for females and family members. An outsider here means a non-family member, and he or she is not allowed to occupy or even pass-by this area if the head of family is not around, in order to avoid slander. The interior spaces for daily activities are divided into public, semi-public, semi-private and private areas.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methods used in this study is physical on-site measurement (layout), observations and in-depth interviews with occupants. There are a small number of samples that were selected from Malay families in Melaka. Most of the selected MTH is in different sizes of layout plan which have already been expanded following the needs of the family. The selected respondents were interviewed based on their availability and willingness, and the selection of the houses was made based on the best level of originality in architecture and interior, current condition of MTH and accessibility. Most of the MTH were found to have undergone major renovations by their owners and have lost their architectural novelty. During the site visit, some MTH were found abandoned by their owners and there were areas of the houses that were difficult to access for this study. Some MTH were also found severely damaged and destroyed. These are some restricted factors that affected the study. This research was set at a natural setting in the MTH where the information was gathered by using open-ended questions and interactively collaborating with the respondents to collect the verbal data (Creswell, 2009; 2012) whilst as for visual documentation data collection used the Nikon DSLR camera. These collected data are used and discussed in this paper.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results from the in-depth interviews with the occupants of MTH reveal their religious beliefs, culture and social interactions in daily life. Malay behavioral norms remain to be an important aspect in regulating the seclusion and solitude of occupants especially for females in the families. Family bonding will be strengthened in their daily life activities, based on the info graphic data. Figure 4 shows the chart of zoning area of the occupants' daily life living in MTH and also shown are the areas meant for males and females. The zoning mentioned in the chart are the public area, semi-public area, semi-private area and private area. The most important zone is the private (seclusion) space for females, this area only meant for females in the house and some other time it can also be used by males of the family, such as the sleeping area in the *rumah ibu*. The result also shows that the way of daily life, everyday social interaction and behavioral norms are aligned with their religious belief and culture. The finding is toward the zoning of space, planning and regulating privacy, which is seen more towards the individual, family and the seclusion of females.

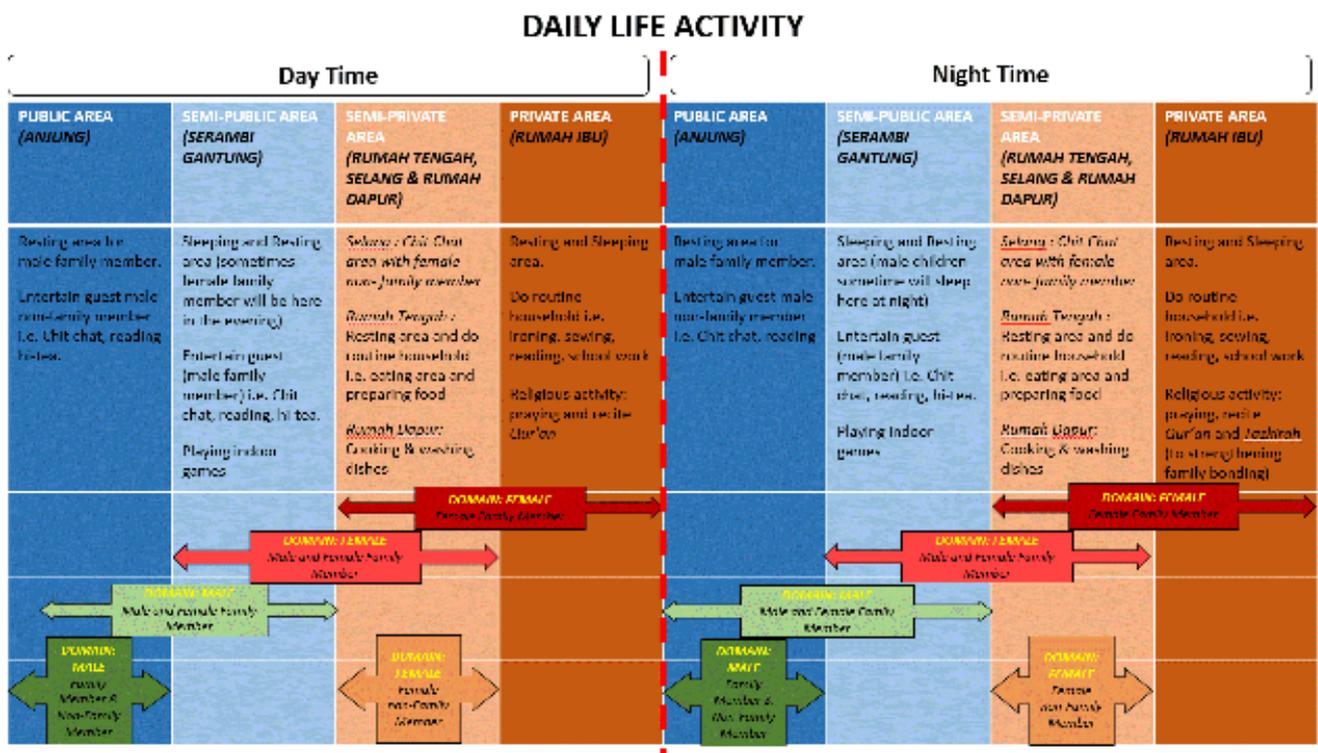


Figure 4. Daily activities of MTH occupants.

### 4.CONCLUSION

This paper studies the space planning of MTH in relation to the daily activities of its occupants. Islamic teachings and cultural norms can clearly be seen in protecting the privacy of the residents where there is the use of curtains to block the view from the intrusive eyes of non-family members. Furthermore, Islamic teachings are also applied in spatial arrangement that emphasize on the gender segregation and the separation between public and private spaces. The understanding of these divisions toward the seclusion of space should be taken into considerations in designing Malay Muslim houses in the future. For further research, there is a need to study more on MTH architectural elements such as windows, doors, opening and the opening treatments towards the level of privacy in the house.

## REFERENCES

### Articles

1. Daud, N. I. M. K., Arbi, E., & Faisal, M. (2012). Pengaplikasian ukiran kayu melayu dalam seni bina di Malaysia. *Journal of Design and Built Environment*, 11, 1–14.
2. Ghaffarianhoseini, A., Berardi, U., Dalilah, N., & Ghaffarianhoseini, A. (2014). What can we learn from Malay vernacular houses ? *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 13, 157–170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2014.04.008>
3. Gharaei, F. M. N., & Rafieian, M. (2013). Investigating Cross-Cultural Differences in Personal Space : Kurdish and Northern women in Iran. *Journal of Asian Behavioral Studies*, 3(8),69–78.
4. Rapoport, A. (2008). Some Further Thoughts on Culture and Environment. *Archnet-IJAR, International Journal of Architectural Research*, 2(1), 16–39.
5. Mohd Sabrizaa, A. R. (2009). Cadangan kaedah kod 's' bagi penamaan dan penentuan motif bunga ukiran melayu dalam proses inventori. *Persidangan Antarabangsa Kesenian 2009 - Seni Dekorasi:Pelestarian & Pembangunan Akademi Pengajian Melayu Universiti Malaya, 5 Dan 6 Ogos 2009*.
6. Noorul Huda, M. R., & Talib, A. (2013). Aspects of Privacy in Muslim Malay Traditional Dwelling Interiors in Melaka. *AicE-Bs 2013 London, Asia Pacific International Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies, University of Westminster, London, 105*, 644–654. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.11.067>
7. Siti Aisyah, M. (2020). POTENTIAL APPLICATION OF THE MODULAR SYSTEM IN TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSE IN MODERN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY. *Ournal of Critical Reviews*, 7(2), 801–805.

### Books

8. Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Third Edit). SAGE Publications, Inc.
9. Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (C. Robb (ed.); Fourth Edi). University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
10. Gibbs, P. (1987). *Building a Malay House*. oxford University press.
11. Gurupiah, M., & Ra'alah, M. (1998). The Basic Malay House and The Malay House of the Peninsular West Coast. In C. V. Fee (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia – Architecture* (Chen Voon, pp. 5, 24–25). Archipelago Press.
12. Mohd Sabrizaa, A. R. (2017). *Rumah Kutai Documentation of Memories*. Institut Darul Ridzuan.
13. Mortada, H. (2003). *Traditional Islamic Principles of Built Environment*. Routledge Curzon.
14. Nasir, A. H. (1982). Rumah Serambi Melaka. In K. K. Khoo (Ed.), *Melaka, dahulu dan sekarang* (1st ed., pp. 27–50). Persatuan Muzium Malaysia.
15. Nasir, A. H. (1985). *Pengenalan Rumah Tradisional Melayu Semenanjung Malaysia*. Darulfikir.
16. Nasir, A. H., & Wan Teh, W. H. (1996). *The Traditional Malay House*. Fajar Bakti.

17. Omer, S. (2010). *Islam and Housing*. A. S. Noordeen.
18. Rapoport, A. (1969). *House Form and Culture*. Prentice-Hal, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.
19. Yaa'cob, Z., Yusof, A. F., & Nordin, T. E. (2021). *Lukisan Terukur Rumah Tradisional Melayu*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
20. Yuan, L. J. (1987). *The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia's Indigenous Shelter System*. Institut Masyarakat.
21. Yuan, L. J. (1991). *The Traditional Malay House. Part II: Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge and Practices* (pp. 73–97).

## Declaration

22. Abidin, W. B. W. (1981). *The Malay House: Rationale and Change*. MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.
23. Anuar, T. (2006). *THE PERAK KUTAI ASLI MALAY HOUSE : FORM , FUNCTION AND MEANING*. (Issue May). Unversiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam