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Seri Iskandar Campus, Perak, MALAYSIA



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SIMPORA XVI: 2025**

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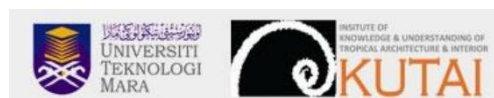
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The paper's objective is to present the findings of cultural values and practices of Rembau's *Adat Perpatih* practicing community home space named *serambi* that is related to diplomacy in the spatial design and the relevance in modern-urban-house designs. The Negeri Sembilan's *Adat Perpatih* is defined as a social structure involving the relationships and processes of socio-economy based on maternal lineage as the main fundamental, in which the core is for harmonious communal life (Kadir, 2016; Selat, 1990). Thus, NSMT home spatial designs are culturally functional and instilled with meanings from the society's life-views, the *Adat Perpatih*'s cultural practices and values being manifested in order "harmonious communal life" is achieved.

The *serambi* is a distinctive home space in the NSMT houses (Idrus, 1996; Masri, 2016), in which its shape, form and features contribute to the characteristics of the NSMT houses.

The *Adat Perpatih* practicing societies in Negeri Sembilan, a prolific and intricately unique traditions or customs is the legacy of the Minangkabau Malay matrilineal community from Sumatera, Indonesia that settled in Negeri Sembilan (NS). Assimilation easily occurred during the two major waves of *merantau* in 14th century, through marriages with the daughters of indigenous settlers' leaders (*Tok Batin*) in NS, the Jakun (*Orang Biduanda*) and Sakai (*Orang Bukit*) people who are also matrilineal practicing societies. The visibly unique architecture of the NS Malays, and regarded as one of the symbols of Malaysian architecture, are reminiscent of the Minangkabau Malay community origins. Further comprehension of the historical background and significance, spaces of NSMT houses particularly the *serambi*, and relationships with the Minangkabau people, essentially may be referred to Masri (2012, 2013) and Masri et al. (2016).

1.1 Research Background

The research from which this paper is produced was aimed in exploring the relevance of *Adat Perpatih* practicing society's cultural practices in modern-urban-house designs. The site is Kampung Penajis (Kg. Penajis) in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Kg. Penajis is the denoted customary ancestral land (*tanah adat*) to the *Batu Hampar Minangkabau* (BHM) clan (*suku*).

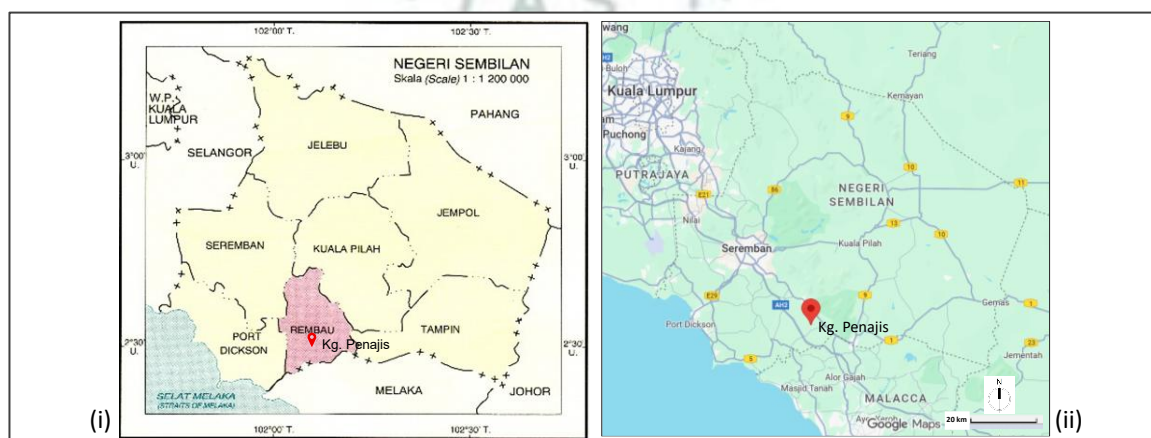


Figure 1: (i) Map of Negeri Sembilan with the 7 present districts; (ii) Location of Kg. Penajis

Image Copyright, JUPEM (2006) and Google Map (2025).

Importantly to be noted that the village's geographical scope was based on the "traditional boundary", culturally accepted by the society whom they referred to as *Kg. Penajeh* (local dialect). The community within the clan studied was the family group (*perut hilir*) of the late *Dato' Lembaga* (Head of Clan) of the BHM clan's during the duration of the study. The family group resides in Kg. Penajis Bandar (present village name) within *Kg. Penajeh*.

Adat Perpatih was the selected cultural group instead of *Adat Temenggung* in the Malay Peninsula of Malaysia, through the first objective as well as the selected site and community. First objective was essentially the determinant of the contextual aspects and scope, without which, the second and third objectives could not be conducted. Renovated and newly built modern houses of the Rembau's *Adat Perpatih* practicing societies were found to be facing diminishing cultural values that were ingrained in their traditional home design. Mainly to accommodate modern amenities such as sanitary plumbing and water supply for the more practical modern kitchen, bathroom, and toilet inside the house. During the old traditional NSMT houses, the bathroom and toilet are located outside the house. In addition, lack of guidelines to help protect them. The second and third objective includes in-depth investigation of the activities within their home spaces and synthesized into documentations that may be used as narratives for future guidelines in home design. The scope of home spaces within their cultural settings consists of the indoor and outdoor spaces and home compound.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Issues in contemporary home design

Alterations of residence by current homeowners had emerged to be a 'culture' were found to have been caused by the lack of socio-cultural values, particularly on the external aesthetics (Saruwono et al., 2012). Thus, indicative of standardized design in mass housing failed to meet user's requirements (Jusan & Sulaiman, 2005). Moreover, Surat et al. (2012) and Kassim et al. (2017) emphasized, current modern houses in Malaysia had lost aspect of culture in design and critically diminishing in the cultural values commonly inculcated in the Malay traditional home designs. Mohd Balwi's (2005) comparison between Western and Asian societies highlighted that the Asian societies, particularly the Malay societies, the intangible elements are highly prioritized such as adhering to requirements, *adat* and culture, compared to Western societies. The importance of the tangible elements, essentially vital to be noted: are built within the frameworks of the Malay's intangible elements itself. Thus, local contemporary home design with Western dominated values may cause major issues related to cultural values and practices.

2.2 Culture, values, activities and home spaces

Cen et al. (2023) highlighted that mutual influence between architectural space and culture was shown by some studies. Yatim's (2009) emphasized that culture should also 'nurture and educate' the human towards becoming better people hence better society, consequently better civilization. Architecture is one of the manifested forms of cultural process.

The home spatial design is integrally influenced by the society's cultural milieu fundamentally related with society's cultural phenomenon (Rapoport, 1969). Cultural phenomenon is parallel to the term *adat*, the basis of the Malay's social systems and culture (Kling, 1994; Saludin, 2014). *Adat*, in general, forms models of and for behaviour through the conveyed meanings, moral force and social relevance that act as life guiding principles (Kadir, 2016; Peletz, 1988). Essentially, consisting: customs, traditions, social systems, societal norms and etiquette, values, practices and laws. The innate manifestations of the society and their cultural practices, the totality of values and activities (Oliver, 2006). Cultural values provide meanings and direction to the lives of the individual members as it influences the activities within their home spaces. The insights of culture's values and the choices in the midst of possible responses to both physical and cultural variables are factors that turn a 'house' into a 'home'.

Values, the intangible components of culture, are guiding principles of behaviour and judgement across a specific object and situational, and differs between different ethnic groups (Md Nawi, 2017; Hu et al., 2016; Rapoport, 2006). Cultural values, thus defined as the values identified and interpreted from the society's cultural practices in their home spaces. The judgement would be interpreted from the 'specific objects and situation' within the design of the home spaces. As such, *Adat Perpatih* society's point of view differentiates them from other groups of people, reflected in their traditional home's spatial interpretations.

Patterns of human activities within the home spaces give meanings to the behaviour or action obtained from the values and norms of the culture and its institutions which differentiates them from other groups of people (Yatim, 2009; Mohd Balwi, 2005). Consequently, the relationship between space, activities and values within their cultural settings is found to be parallel with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Masri, 2021). Man's psychological functioning best to be understood through continuous reciprocal interaction between behaviour and its controlling condition (Bandura, 1971), the spatial elements and features. Particularly so, in the context of this paper, diplomacy in behaviour that demonstrates decorum and propriety passively shaped by the situational cues created by the spatial elements and features of the home spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This paper's methodology engaged on a selective literature reviews, results, analysis and discussion with specific intent to present the findings of the architectural features and spatial design aspect in the *serambi* space only, that ingrained with diplomatic situational condition

and cues for the users during special occasions and events of the community. It is based on exploratory research with qualitative approaches. Historical literature review was the method used to determine the cultural group; site and community studied in the first research objective, before proceeding to execute second and third objectives. Case study, narratives and ethnography were the several approaches employed in the methods of data collection. Qualitative approach data collection techniques were participant-observation and purposive casual and spontaneous conversations. The resulted family tree (lineage) diagram of the community during the pilot study served as the research instruments in defining boundaries of observed activities and matrilineal family relationships. Two main factors in data reliability were the presence of one or more expert key informants in all the occasions observed and researcher participate as family member. Data validity was achieved through the case study protocols, documented pictographic data, recordings and triangulation of measures. The main data analysis software used were ATLAS.ti8. Results were presented through thematic arrangement and discussions.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Presented in this paper are the analysis of the results that demonstrated diplomacy in serambi's spatial design during special occasions: exterior features of *serambi*, the designated names of the *serambi*'s interior zoning, the *pangkal* and *hujung* serambi are philosophically relates to the environment and cultural practices.

4.1 Exterior features of serambi: Asymmetry of the facade

In NSMT homes, *serambi* forms most of the facade of NSMT houses where the main entrance is located. Figure 2 showed fully enclosed *serambi*, but some are open (partially enclosed) with half-height wall are called “*langkan*”. In some cases, they were also decorated with timber carvings. Asymmetry, of the NSMT houses facade was found to be attributed by the following features:

1. The longitudinal shape of the serambi façade.
2. The positioning of the main entrance door.

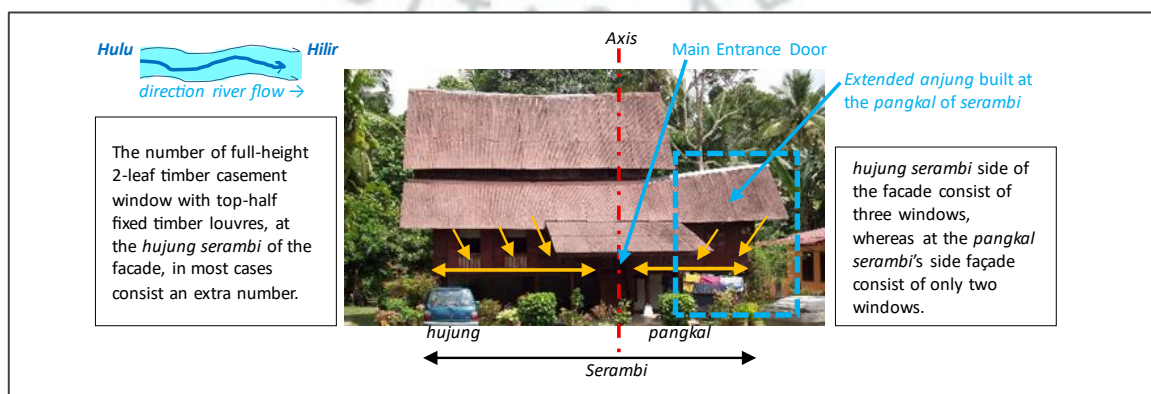


Figure 2: Asymmetry at facade of house (H4) with one *anjung* at *pangkal* serambi.
Image Copyright, Masri (2021, p.215).

As seen in Figure 2, the main entrance door's placement creates asymmetry on the facade, provides a clear dichotomy, distinguishing between *pangkal* (shorter) and *hujung* of *serambi* (lengthier). House of Induk Salbiah (H4), also the *telapak* of the late Dato' Lembaga (Head of Clan) of *Suku Batu Hampar Minangkabau*, Almarhum YM Dato' Gempa Maharaja Ismail bin Yasin. On However, symmetry, was found to be allowed only for the palaces' facade.

4.2 Serambi's interior zoning: orientation relationship with environment

Figure 3 shows the basic typology of *serambi*, three distinct interior zonings denoted: *hujung*, *tengah* and *pangkal*. The placement of the main entrance door and door to *rumah ibu* are among the "situational conditioning features" in *serambi* spatial design. Thus, *hujung serambi*, locally refers to lengthier zone in comparison to *pangkal*. The door to *rumah ibu* normally located at *tengah serambi*. The interior zonings were orientated with the *hujung serambi* faces the *hulu* direction and the *pangkal serambi* faces the *hilir* direction. *Hulu* is the upstream direction, locally means the direction of where the river starts or the river's spring (*mata air*). *Hilir* is the downstream direction where the rivers end, locally mean direction of the river mouth (*muara sungai*) towards the sea.

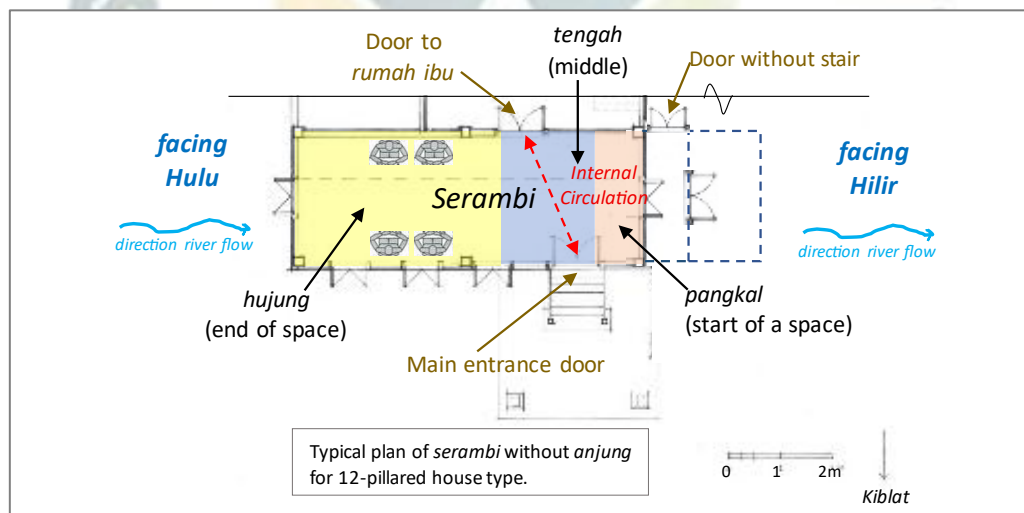


Figure 3: Interior zoning in *serambi* without any *anjung* extension.

Image Copyright, Masri (2021, p.211, p.273).

Although the results and analysis shown in Figure 3 showed the basic typical NSMT houses, but the interior zonings denoted is similar in orientation for NSMT house with one, two and/or three *anjungs*. Intriguingly, in the NSMT house typology where the *pangkal serambi* is extended to form an *anjung*, a door without a stair was found to be added on the elevation that faces the rear of the house.

DISCUSSIONS

Eight special occasions were observed: Weddings; Family Day; Mantai Day; *Hari Raya Puasa* (*eid ul Fitri*); *Hari Raya Haji* (*eid ul Adha*) and Korban; Family Life Activities; *Kenduri Doa*

Selamat; Death. The research findings were discussed under twelve main themes, but presented here are discussions within three main themes related to the diplomacy in *serambi's* spatial design: cultural practices; asymmetry; philosophical values.

5.1 Cultural Practices: diplomacy in receiving guest

According to the findings, the community's cultural practices/customs surrounding the sitting arrangements for guests and cultural leaders is the *hujung serambi* space. The "respected" internal zone for visitors and guests. The four primary cultural practices associated with socio-cultural interactions identified were: *Mesyuarat* (meeting) *orang pangkal*; seating of Dato' Undang, *orang adat*, and Dato' Lembaga; the Imam's seating area during the *doa selamat* event; and the guests' seating area. Placing guests including cultural and religious leaders at the *hujung serambi* during special occasions and events would diplomatically prevent the residence and guests' presence from being ill-mannered by their cultural societal norms. Passing in-front or at the back of a sitting guest is ill-mannered in the Malay culture. These findings contrasted with part of Abd Latif and Kosman (2017) findings in the context of Kuala Pilah district which suggest contextual variations between local cultural practices.

Cultural practices of the *serambi's* orientation in Rembau were found that, regardless which side of the road a house is located, its *hujung serambi* faces the *hulu* (upstream) in Kg. Penajis. This result is consistent with the findings of Abd Latif and Kosman (2017), and Idrus (1996). *Hujung serambi* was ranked as the most noble of the three zones in Idrus's advocacy of the conceptual hierarchy in *serambi's* internal spatial zoning. Although there are differences in cultural practices of the guest seating arrangements with Idrus's findings due to local contextual adaptations, but *hujung serambi* still faces the *hulu*. Thus, *hulu* orientation for *hujung serambi* is the local cultural practices in creating the situational conditions of the space in educating the desired behavioural that displays decorum in entertaining guests in special occasions and daily life.

5.2 Asymmetry of Serambi's Facade: The Malay Diplomacy

In communicating to the community, society and educating the residence's family, the *hulu* orientation for *hujung serambi* is defined using the placement of the main entrance door creating the *hujung serambi* as the lengthier space in comparison to the *pangkal serambi*. The creation of asymmetry on the facade by placing the main entrance door more towards the *hilir* (as shown in Figure 2).

Table 1: The Malay sayings related to the sixth and eleventh traits

Malay Sayings of the sixth traits	Malay Sayings of the eleventh traits
6 th trait: " <i>halus budi bahasa dan budi pekerti</i> " (translation: refined verbal and behavioural manners): " <i>Kalau hendak tahu orang berbangsa, Tengok kepada budi dan bahasanya, Dalam berkata berlemah lembut, Dalam melangkah berpatut-patut, Bila duduk tahu tempatnya, Bila tegak tahu adatnya.</i> "	11 th trait: ' <i>tahu tempat letak sesuatu dan diri setiap orang dan bertindak sewajarnya</i> ' (translation: knowing the position of something and every person and acted accordingly): " <i>Apa tanda orang bermaruah: Tahu letak dengan susunnya, Tahu duduk dengan tegaknya, Tahu susur dengan galurnya, Tahu menjaga adat lembaga, Tahu memelihara harta pusaka.</i> "

(Source: Masri, 2021, adapted from Musa et al., 2012)

The *serambi*'s facade's asymmetry articulated clear communication in a passive and subtle manner how to act in accordance with the required etiquette and decorum, from everyday visits to the house as guests to special occasions when any of the cultural leaders are present. The facade design is mirrored into spatial characteristics of the *serambi* interior zones as shown in Figure 3. The ability to differentiate between the *hujung* and *pangkal* of *serambi*, enabling a person to clearly identified diplomatically where their seating location should be among the guests. Thus, culturally they are considered "*beradat*" or else they are "*tak tahu* (ignorance of) *adat*". These addresses two among twenty-six core Malay social character traits listed by Musa et al. (2012) as demonstrated by Table 1 (Masri, 2021, adapted from Musa et al., 2012).

5.3 Philosophical value in distinguishing between the 'hujung' and 'pangkal'

The embedded concept of relating spatial design characteristics of *serambi* to the natural environment (direction of river flow's orientation) demonstrated the application of the Malay ancestor's archipelagic culture's life philosophy: "*Alam Berkembang Menjadi Guru*" (*Environment as the Teacher*). Houses or homes as microcosmic was applied. When the river is no longer the main transportation system, the traditional houses in Kg. *Penajeh* were built facing the main road. However, this philosophical value traditions remains as their cultural practices.

FINDINGS

6.1 The value features and spatial design elements in *serambi*

The value features related to the diplomacy in the *serambi* spatial design are: the positioning of the main entrance door; placement of the door to the *rumah ibu* in relation to the main entrance door; the dichotomy in the proportion of the length between the *hujung* and *pangkal* interior zone of the *serambi*; and the orientation of *hujung serambi* faces the hulu; the ventilation holes at the floor of the attic that forms part of the *serambi*'s ceiling. The spatial aspects are determined by the cultural functional contexts and placement of these value features.

The value features that ensure a guest or anyone entering the *serambi* space through the main entrance door with their right foot will be part of the *rumah tangga* (porch) discussion, an outdoor space. The emergent finding, the "door without a stair" at the houses with *anjung* addition's *pangkal serambi* are related to a major communal cultural activity of the society for ceremonial events called *Cari Kayu-Akar*. Both findings will be presented in other papers.

CONCLUSIONS

The cultural values were synthesized from the observed behavioural patterns shaped by the situational conditioning features of the physical home features or elements and spatial aspects during activities that occurred within the home spaces. These "situational

conditioning features” are the “value features” theorized to be cultural-tradition resilience criteria in present home design that preserved the cultural values of the *Adat Perpatih* practicing communities in Rembau. Undeniably, aspects of religions, traditions and local wisdom are the major fundamentals of the synthesized cultural values. Preservations of this value in newly built houses on *tanah adat* would be recommended to preserve cultural identity. Diplomacy in home spatial design context depends on a standardized architectural “value features” that are cues understood and practiced by the society that subtly direct and educate the individuals or groups of the expected adab, etiquette and decorum in their behavioural patterns. More importantly, cultural practices which became the societal norms, are also civilizational in value. The famous ‘Malay Diplomacy’ as told in the Malay Annals not only in the way Malays converse and behave but also in their home spatial design.

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