

# Modernization of Traditional Malay House in Heritage Village of Malacca

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## ABSTRACT

Received: 4/12/2020  
Reviewed: 24/12/2020  
Accepted: 8/1/2021

*Traditional Malay house is undergoing a lot of changes and threatened by modernization where its function, form and structure are affected. A lot of traditional Malay houses today are not considered as original vernacular houses where they are transformed and modernized into mixed design types between traditional and recent modern design. This paper aims to clarify modernization and alteration done, and new internal usage of selected four traditional Malay houses in two heritage villages: Kampung Banda Kaba and Kampung Sidang Seman, in Malacca. Interviews and field investigations were carried out at the selected houses that chosen based on the existing of original structure such as rumah ibu, rumah dapur and raised floor. Findings showed that all four traditional Malay houses had created a new usage style where the owners had altered and extend their houses based on their current needs and lifestyles.*

**Keywords:** modernization, traditional Malay house, heritage village, rumah ibu, rumah dapur

## INTRODUCTION

A Malay house is referred to as a traditional house, which is inhabited by a Malay family, who mainly populate the traditional village. However, most of the Malay houses that can be found today have been influenced by the urbanization and modernization where a typical traditional Malay house with the original materials and architectural style can hardly be seen. In Malaysia, traditional Malay house is slowly extinct where there is evolutionary process (Ismail & Sani, 2002). The design of traditional architecture is modernized and altered into more complex and turned into exclusive forms such as the changes in the techniques of making them and its uses (Kamaruddin, 2015). Hosseini et al. (2012) stated that the creation and changes of physical and spatial characteristics of traditional Malay house is influenced by the needs and customs of purity among Malays. As example, the traditional Malay houses in Kampung Morten, Malacca are affected by deterioration even has gazetted as heritage village where it is considered as a conservation zone and protected area. Mainly, it is because of rapid urbanization and industrialization, and lack of regular maintenance by the house owners.

The alteration work gives a bad impact towards the traditional Malay house where conserving their heritage values could prevent threatening the originality of the traditional Malay village and their traditional Malay houses (Rahman et al., 2015). Therefore, any alteration works should overcome or prevent adverse psychological (Isnin et al., 2012). Alteration is needed nowadays where the presence of traditional Malay house can be categorized into four different states of continued existence (Table 1) (Kamaruddin, 2015). According to Omar et al. (2016), the possibility for home alteration is important for people where the houses achieved the basic physical comfort needed. Nevertheless, modification was made in order to improve and achieve the desired functional and psychological comfort.

**Table 1: The States of Continued Existence Alteration of Traditional Malay House**

| Alterations  | Reasons  |
|--|--|
| 1. Modification or extension of old structures                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing number of house occupants in order to upgrade the house into more comfortable living environment</li> <li>• Safety purpose due to timber defect</li> </ul> |
| 2. Adaptation or reuse of an old building                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New functionality of the house</li> </ul>   |
| 3. Reconstruction of old structure   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A form of the building reconstruction or a replica of a prominent house</li> </ul>  |
| 4. Adoption of the architectural form in modern materials and construction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The adoption of traditional features or structural components in modern building design</li> </ul>  |

Source: (Kamaruddin, 2015)

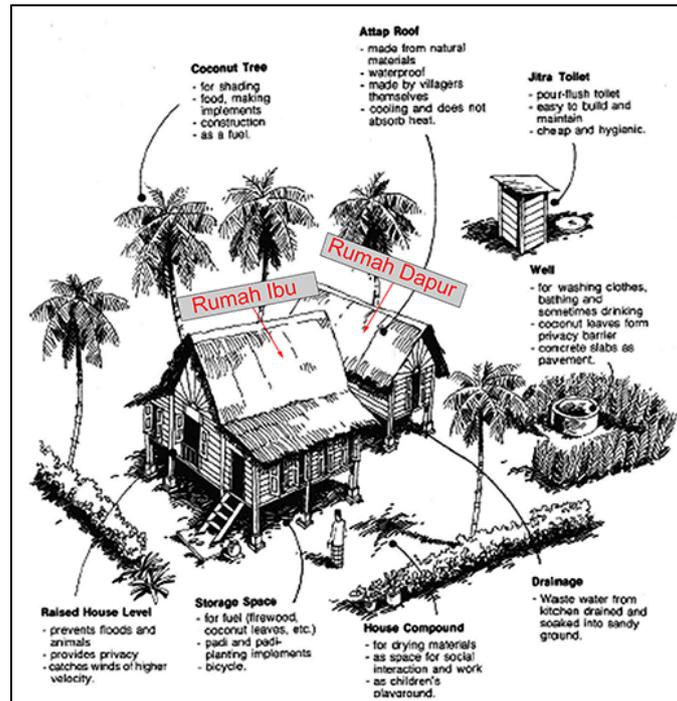
This research is aimed to clarify the alteration done and modernization occurred at selected traditional Malay houses in heritage villages in Malacca. The objectives of this research are to identify the new internal usage of the traditional Malay houses after being threatened by the modernization where it affects the original spatial usage of the traditional Malay house and to explore factors contributing to the transformation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Traditional Malay House

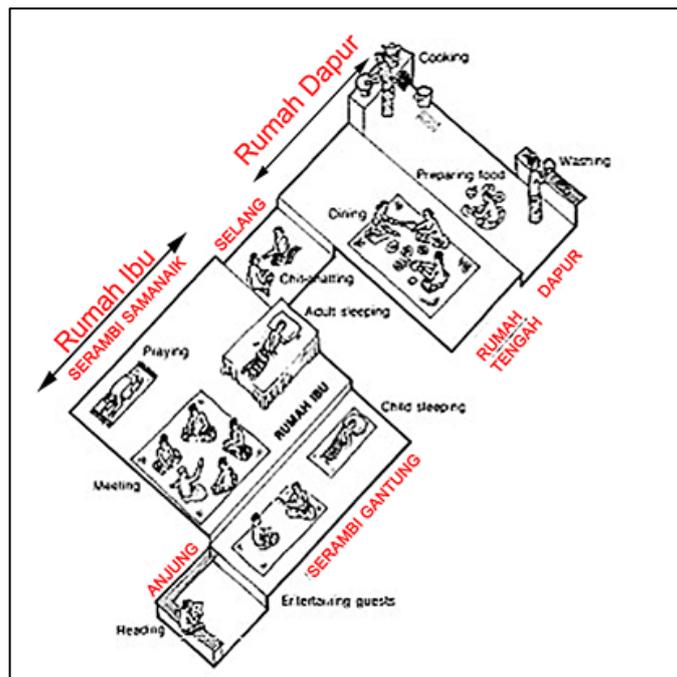
Nasir and Teh (1996) indicated that the characteristics of a Malay house are according to each state in Malaysia. They also described that a Malay house can be defined as a traditional house, which is occupied by Malays who live in the rural village, and a house that is built according to terms of lifestyle and custom of Malays.

Thus, according to Lim (1987), a traditional Malay house can be described from its typical characteristics of the external environments such as raised floor level, storage space under the house, compound with no boundary, drainage under the kitchen, well, a jitra toilet, attap roof and coconut trees that are planted surrounding the house (Figure 1). The Malay house is divided into two parts: the rumah ibu (the main house) and the rumah dapur (the kitchen house). In some states, both these houses were connected by a selang (corridor) where the internal usages of the traditional Malay house are shown in Figure 2. The space under the rumah ibu is used for storing farming tools, farming product, or bicycle while the space under the rumah dapur is used as sewage. The well and toilet are built separated and far from the house.



Source: (Lim, 1987)

Figure 1: External Environment of a Traditional Malay House



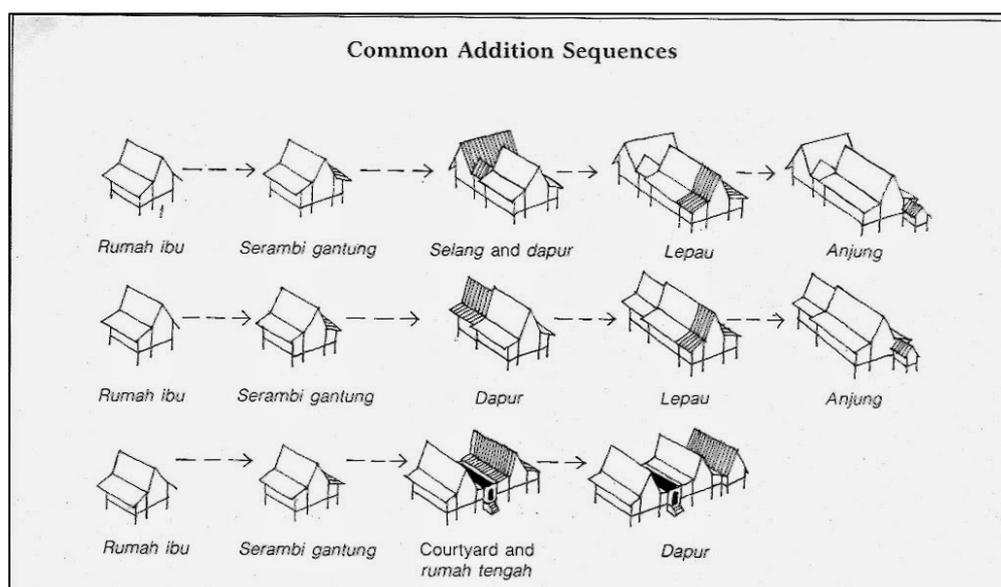
Source: (Gibbs, 1987)

Figure 2: Internal Usage of a Traditional Malay House

In addition, according to Gibbs (1987), the internal usage in a Malay house is influenced by the Islam religion, which discourages relationship between female and male outside the family. The male of family members and guests usually use the entrance in front of the rumah ibu, which is called anjung (verandah). Meanwhile, the rumah dapur is used for female members in the family and children who use the entrance that is located adjacent to rumah dapur, which is sometimes located at the selang. The multifunctional spaces in a Malay house and the separated built system of rumah ibu and rumah dapur allows the house to be expanded at any part of the house.

Thus, according to Lim (1987), the traditional additional system of a traditional Malay house gives various choices to the user who intends to extend the house where it can be enlarged in accordance with the variation of size and quality. The enlargement of the house depends on the priorities of the users in terms of their needs and means. In the traditional additional system, serambi gantung, serambi samanaik, and lepau are built adjacent to the rumah ibu while kelek anak in the rumah dapur (Figure 3).

Lim also stated that the usage of space is defined by the floor height where the rumah ibu is considered as the most important part of a Malay house where women normally spent their time and carry out the household duties in this house while men are working outside. The open spaces under the house reflect neighborliness and satisfy the communal needs of the residents. The openness of the internal space, the compound and the floor culture of Malays allow the inhabitants to held kenduri for wedding ceremony and other religious events in the house and gotong-royong works on the compound.



Source: (Lim, 1987)

**Figure 3:** Additional Traditional Malay House System

## Alteration and Modernization of the Traditional Malay House

Alteration is a process of building renewal and changes where it could affect the usability of the building in order to preserve for continuous usage in the buildings. According to Isnin et al. (2012), alteration projects for housing will involve many construction activities such as preparation of basic design, demolition work, relocation and new installation of building structures and materials.

According to Gibbs (1987), modernization on the Malay house began during the British colonial period when modern facilities of the new building materials and living equipment are imported. Zinc is introduced as the material for the new roof, brick and cement became new building material that replacing timber, and modern furniture are used such as sofa and tables.

## Heritage Village in Malacca

As recognized by the Malacca Museums Corporation (Perbadanan Muzium Melaka; PERZIM, 2016), heritage village functions as a tourist location where it can promote the village. There are seven villages that have been gazetted as heritage villages in Malacca, which are Kampung Morten, Kampung Chitty, Kampung Portugis, Perkampungan Baba Nyonya Melaka, Kampung Banda Kaba, Kampung Bukit China and Kampung Sidang Seman. These heritage villages are gazetted under the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage 1988 Enactment (Amendment 1993) where there are few conservation actions that need to be considered in the recognition process. The conservation actions

considered are architectural and building design, residents' culture and customs, daily activities of Malay communities, traditional craft, and food business. Kampung Banda Kaba and Kampung Sidang Seman are selected as a case study in this research, representing two heritage villages that are mainly occupied by Malays and located in both urban and rural areas of Malacca.

### **Kampung Banda Kaba**

Kampung Banda Kaba is chosen as a case study where it is located in a suburb area called Sabba, which is inhabited by the Malays who lived in the swamps and made Nipah wine for trade (Chen, 1998). Its name is believed given by the Portuguese which means 'a village in the end of the town'. Then, it has become a settlement for Malay government workers during the Dutch and British era. After independence in 1957, the glory slowly disappeared due to the transformation of the land status from government land to freehold in 1969. Affected from that, some of the Malays started renting and selling their land, and moving out to another villages. The urbanization and modernization of the houses are mostly affected by the influence of the village's surrounding which has developed as a city center. The village is gazetted as a heritage village by the government in 2015 as an action to preserve the left small numbers of traditional Malay houses from more damage by the urbanization and extinction.

### **Kampung Sidang Seman**

Kampung Sidang Seman is a small village found in the rural area of Kampung Sungai Rambai where it is located at the South Malacca in Jasin district rear the broader of Johor Darul Takzim. The name of Kampung Sungai Rambai is derived from a rambai tree. The village has been inhabited in early 1800s where the original inhabitants are believed to come from three villages: Kampung Tedong, Kampung Serkam and Kampung Kesang in Muar, Johor. Although the history of the village has not yet been discovered further and documented, the village is gazetted by the government as a heritage village due to its potential for conservation of traditional Malay houses, and traditional culture and rural lifestyle.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A review on the traditional Malay houses is carried out based on research by Nasir and Teh (1996), Lim (1987), and Gibbs (1987)). Four traditional Malay houses in two heritage villages at Malacca, Kampung Banda Kaba and Kampung Sidang Seman are selected as the case studies. Four houses are selected according to the external survey such as the existing of traditional architecture of raised house level, timber structure, rumah ibu and rumah dapur. Meanwhile, the two villages were selected based on their status as heritage villages, which are located in the urban area (Kampung Banda Kaba) and in the rural area (Kampung Sidang Seman). Interviews with the house owners or their representatives were conducted and field investigations were carried out at the selected houses in both kampung. Both of these research methods were used in order to identify the history, culture, lifestyles, the transformation on the traditional Malay houses, and factors contributing to the transformation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Several issues were found occurred at Kampung Banda Kaba and Kampung Sidang Seman from interviews held with the owners and their representatives (Table 2). Meanwhile, findings for the alteration of traditional Malay houses at both villages, and factors contributing to the alteration are shown in Table 3 and Table 4. Furthermore, the indication for model layout plan as shown in Table 3 is used in order to specify the space and functions of selected traditional Malay houses. As a result, both of these villages are facing similar issues due to financial problems and difficulty to carry out maintenance of the houses. Owners of traditional Malay houses in Kampung Banda Kaba have started renting their houses and land to the Chinese people, and selling the land to the government for housing development projects. Meanwhile, in Kampung Sidang Seman, owners are having difficulty to carry

out maintenance of their houses to the high cost and lack on knowledge. It is difficult to maintain the houses in both villages due to the lack of traditional skills and original materials. Traditional Malay houses are basically built from timber, which is more expensive nowadays and caused the owners to choose other materials such as bricks for the extension, renovation or rebuilding their houses. Moreover, craftsmen or traditional builders with skill and expert on traditional Malay houses are difficult to find.

**Table 2:** Issues occurred at Kampung Banda Kaba and Kampung Sidang Seman

| Problems Issues                  | Kampung Banda Kaba (KBK) | Kampung Sidang Seman (KSS) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Diminishing size of village land | ✓                        |                            |
| Increasing family members        | ✓                        |                            |
| Financial problems               | ✓                        | ✓                          |
| Difficulty to maintain the house | ✓                        | ✓                          |
| Flood                            | ✓                        |                            |

**Table 3:** The states of continued existence alteration of traditional Malay house

| Indication | Meanings               |
|------------|------------------------|
| AB         | <i>Anjung Belakang</i> |
| AD         | <i>Anjung Depan</i>    |
| AT         | <i>Anjung Tengah</i>   |
| G          | Gallery                |
| K          | Kitchen                |
| LR         | Living Room            |
| MR         | Main Room              |
| OS         | Open Space             |
| P          | Porch                  |
| R          | Room                   |
| RI         | <i>Rumah Ibu</i>       |
| RT         | <i>Rumah Tengah</i>    |
| RM         | <i>Ruang Makan</i>     |
| S          | <i>Serambi</i>         |
| ST         | Store                  |
| T          | Toilet                 |

**Table 4:** Alteration of Traditional Malay House at Kampung Banda Kaba (KBK) and Kampung Sidang Seman (KSS)

| Case  | Model Layout Plan | Notes   | Picture |
|-------|-------------------|---|---------|
| KBK 1 |                   | <p>Extension is made on the ground level next to <i>rumah ibu</i> to provide extra storage room (ST).<br/>                     Alteration work is done inside <i>rumah ibu</i> by adding walls to provide more bedrooms (R1, R2).<br/> <i>Rumah dapur</i> is rebuilt with concrete on ground level to include bathroom.<br/> <i>Selang</i> can be seen where entrance is provided for women and family.</p> |         |
| KBK 2 |                   | <p><i>Rumah ibu</i> is remained.<br/> <i>Serambi</i> is closed and walled (S).<br/>                     Extension is done for living room, kitchen and bedrooms on the ground level with concrete (LR, K, R1, R2).</p>  |         |
| KSS 1 |                   | <p><i>Serambi</i>, <i>rumah ibu</i> and <i>rumah dapur</i> are remained.<br/>                     Alteration is done at <i>rumah ibu</i> and <i>rumah dapur</i>, additional walls were added to provide more bedrooms (R1, R2 and R3).<br/>                     Extension is made on the ground level with concrete to provide more space for kitchen and living rooms (LR, K).</p>                         |         |
| KSS 2 |                   | <p><i>Rumah ibu</i> is remained.<br/>                     Alteration is done under the house, walled with bricks.<br/>                     Extension is made on ground level with concrete at the front and back of the house for gallery (G) and kitchen (K).</p>  |         |

## CONCLUSIONS

The new internal usages of traditional Malay houses and their functions have been clarified. All case studies showed that owners have done alterations on the internal spatial usage and extend their traditional Malay houses due to several reasons. Most of the houses still have their *rumah ibu* from the original of traditional Malay houses while *rumah dapur* have been demolished by extending the houses and bought from raised floor to ground level. In addition, most of the owners have altered their traditional Malay houses by adding walls inside *rumah ibu* in order to provide more bedrooms. Meanwhile, the extension work is made on the ground level with concrete structure in order to provide large spaces such as living room and kitchen. It can clearly be considered that the traditional spatial usage of the traditional Malay house has been disappeared during modernization era. As a result,

although the alteration and extension is a solution for the problems but it has caused extinction of the characteristics of the traditional Malay house where different building materials are used and new architectural styles are introduced.

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