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# FACTORS SHAPING THE PUBLIC'S DISINCLINATION TOWARDS RESIDING IN MALAY TRADITIONAL HOUSES: VILLAGERS' PERSPECTIVES

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#### ABSTRACT

The Malay traditional house, designed to meet the cultural and practical needs of the Malay community, is endangered due to factors like modern construction methods, scarcity of raw materials, local land developments, affordability issues, and a lack of conservation awareness. This qualitative study investigates villagers' perspectives why the public refuses to reside in Malay traditional houses in Pasir Salak, Perak. Using on-site observation and interviews, the study explores the benefits and challenges of living in these houses and examines factors contributing to their declining popularity. To preserve these endangered houses and their cultural significance, raising public awareness is crucial. Effective preservation strategies, such as advocacy, systematic conservation efforts, integration into school curricula, and promotion through media platforms, are recommended. These measures can generate public interest and ensure the enduring cultural significance of Malay traditional houses. This research contributes to the discourse on architectural preservation and cultural heritage management, emphasizing the need for sustainable strategies to safeguard vernacular architecture amid contemporary challenges.

**Keywords:** Traditional malay house, extinction, vernacular architecture, cultural value

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Malay traditional house is a timber house designed for the tropical climate, featuring a post and lintel framework on stilts, with walls made of wood, bamboo, or thatched materials, and a thatched roof. Its construction incorporates ventilation, sun shading mechanisms, and low-thermal-capacity building materials. The building process follows a systematic approach, resembling modern prefabrication techniques but with greater flexibility and diversity. Components are assembled on-site after being built on the ground (Hosseini et al., 2012). The architecture of the Malay traditional house reflects cultural and functional requirements, encompassing characteristics, societal norms, carvings, neighbourhood, community spirit, ties to nature, relationships with the Creator, building methods, planning, and the host's economic circumstances (Misnat et al., 2018).

Incorporating modern construction technologies has led to the gradual neglect and fading importance of these houses (Jee Yuan, 2013; Khairudn et al., 2018). The scarcity of raw materials, particularly wood, has driven up prices, making it economically challenging to construct and maintain these houses (Khairudn et al., 2018). Local land developments and changes in topography have further led to the demolition of these culturally significant structures (Muhammad et al., 2017).

Affordability issues also contribute to neglect and abandonment, as owners often struggle to afford the traditional building techniques, craftsmanship, and necessary repairs (Khairudn et al., 2018; Alsayyad & Arboleda, 2011). Additionally, the lack of public awareness and education regarding the importance of preserving traditional Malay houses exacerbates the problem (Azzran, 2021).

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Malay traditional houses represent an integral part of Malay cultural heritage that deserves utmost care and preservation. Preserving Malay traditional houses is essential to ensure that future generations appreciate and understand the significance of these architectural treasures. These houses serve as tangible representations of the Malay cultural identity and provide insights into the traditional ways of life, craftsmanship, and community dynamics of the past.

However, the Malay traditional houses have been facing abandonment and extinction in recent decades. These issues serve as the inspiration for conducting this research, aiming to address reasons behind people's disinclination towards residing in Malay traditional houses, within the context of Pasir Salak, Perak; where there is a significant number of abandoned and demolished structures (Salleh et al., 2022).

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to explore the underlying reasons for the public's hesitancy to reside in Malay traditional houses, focusing on identifying the key factors that contribute to this reluctance. The study has three specific objectives: (i) to examine the benefits and challenges associated with living in Malay traditional houses, (ii) to investigate the factors influencing the decreasing popularity of these houses among the public, and (iii) to propose recommendations to promote the preservation and cultural value of Malay traditional houses, addressing the concerns that discourage people from choosing to reside in them.

#### SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

This research focuses on examining the factors shaping public's disinclination towards residing in Malay traditional houses, with Pasir Salak, Perak as the case study area. Pasir Salak is chosen due to its significant number of traditional houses and its cultural and historical significance. The target respondents for this research are villagers residing in the selected area. Since the scope of the research is limited to Pasir Salak, Perak, the findings may not be generalized to other regions or populations.

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This research holds significant value for society and various stakeholders as it investigates the factors that contribute to the public's disinclination to reside in Malay traditional houses in Pasir Salak, Perak. The findings of this research have the potential to aid conservation-related bodies and authorities in raising awareness among younger generations about the significance of their ancestral heritage; the Malay traditional houses. Ultimately, this research contributes to societal knowledge and plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

The Malay traditional houses, which serve as symbols of the cultural legacy of the Malays, are constructed using high-quality timber to withstand the hot and humid equatorial climate (Rashid et al., 2019; Salleh et al., 2022). These houses exhibit a spatial architecture that reflects the intricate relationship between culture, environment, socioeconomic factors, and religious beliefs. Despite their significance as tangible heritage, numerous Malay traditional houses have suffered from neglect and abandonment across the country. The literature available covers various aspects such as the advantages and disadvantages of Malay traditional houses, the connection between heritage and values, and include examples of Malay traditional houses found in Perak, particularly in the Pasir Salak area.

#### Benefits and Challenges of Design, Materials and Construction

The design of Malay traditional houses offer several benefits. The elevated design allows for better airflow and ventilation, with raised floors and timber boards facilitating air circulation. The presence of numerous windows and doors at body level promotes cross ventilation and cooling (Hassan & Ramli, 2010). According to Firrdhaus et al. (2015) the fully ventilated roof space and the use of attap roofs contribute to thermal comfort. The large overhangs, low exposed vertical sections, and orientation reduce direct sunlight exposure, provide protection from rain, and maintain good shading. The internal space design, including the *serambi*, *rumah ibu*, and *rumah dapur*, enhances privacy and neighborhood dynamics (Firrdhaus et al., 2015). Wood, a common material in traditional Malay houses, has proven durability and longevity (Sohaimi et al., 2017).

However, there are also challenges associated with Malay traditional houses. Brick and timber construction require additional maintenance, leading to increased costs over time (Carlson, 2018). Bricks are prone to moisture-related issues such as mold and cracking due to their permeability and lower durability compared to stone or concrete. Wood, while aesthetically pleasing, requires frequent refinishing, painting, and protection against insects, fungi, and pests like termites (Carlson, 2018). Addressing these maintenance needs can be costly (Ki, 2019).

#### Relations between Heritage and Value

The concept of heritage conservation is shaped by values and has undergone significant evolution influenced by political and social factors over the past fifty years (Avrami et al., 2019). Varying perspectives exist regarding the significance of specific locations, with differences between heritage experts and the general public. These perspectives can be categorized into societal values and heritage values, both contributing to the field of conservation (Avrami et al., 2019). The field of conservation is rooted in heritage values, encompassing historical, artistic, aesthetic, and scientific aspects that form the basis of heritage conservation (Avrami et al., 2019).

# Types of Malay Traditional Houses in Perak

In Perak, Malay traditional houses include the Kutai House (Rumah Kutai) and Perak Roofed Limas House. These represent the Long-Roofed House (Rumah Bumbung Panjang) and Limas Roofed House (Rumah Bumbung Limas) types (Khairudn et al., 2018).

#### Kutai house (rumah Kutai)

The Kutai House, built in the 1890s, is a traditional house with diminishing numbers along the Perak River due to its scarcity and specific location (Khairudn et al., 2018). It was primarily used for important individuals

connected to the monarchy system, restricting its spread throughout Perak. The structure consists of different areas such as the *rumah Ibu, rumah anjung, rumah tengah,* and *rumah dapur*, each serving specific functions for events and activities (Khairudn et al., 2018). The design emphasizes the importance of materials, construction techniques, and architectural elements, including roof tiles and structures for protection against climatic pressures (Rashid et al., 2019). The walls of the Kutai House are made of woven bamboo called *tepas* or *bertam*, with some incorporating wooden planks (Rashid et al., 2019).



Figure 1: Kutai House Bota (Zubir ,2022)

## Perak roofed Limas house (rumah Limas bumbung Perak)

The Rumah Limas Bumbung Perak is extensively used by the Malay community in Perak, particularly in riverside areas. It was constructed in the early 19th century and is believed to have Dutch influences (Khairudn et al., 2018). The Perak roof style, known as the "Perak roof," is a distinguishing feature of this house, which is simpler to construct compared to the Kutai House (Khairudn et al., 2018). The Limas House's roof structure allows for easy expansion of the interior space. The roof design of the rumah limas potong Perak gained recognition during the colonial era and is associated with Dutch architecture (Rashid et al., 2019). The term 'limas' may derive from the word 'five', referring to the roofs typically having five ridges (Rashid et al., 2019). The construction of the Limas House is reinforced using nails, and it is simpler to build than the Kutai House (Rashid et al., 2019). The Limas House exhibits cultural values of moderation, modesty, and adherence to philosophy, reflected in its uniform front appearance and extra space at the rear (Khairudn et al., 2018).



Figure 2: Limas House (Saleh, 2018)

#### **Abandonment of Traditional Malay Houses**

According to Mallach (2018), various factors contribute to unoccupied properties, such as people relocating and leaving their homes vacant until new occupants arrive. Vacant and abandoned properties, of different types and sizes, have significant impacts on communities and neighborhoods. The term 'unoccupied' encompasses neglected and abandoned properties, which are crucial indicators of property and neighborhood conditions (Mallach, 2018). Vacancies play a vital role in the housing market, allowing individuals and families to find new homes when circumstances change. Without available vacant properties for rent or sale, accessing housing in desired locations becomes challenging (Mallach, 2018). When referring to problematic properties, 'abandoned' means owners have either physically left or neglected the property, leading to deterioration or an unsightly appearance. Mallach (2018) further highlights the two types of abandonment: literal abandonment, where owners have vanished, and constructive abandonment, where owners are present but neglect the property.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, population and sample, and the case study employed in this study.

# Research Design

This qualitative research design focuses on understanding people's experiences through techniques like in-depth interviews, observation, and content analysis (Hennink et al., 2020). Interviews were conducted with villagers residing in Malay traditional houses in Pasir Salak to gather their perspectives on factors influencing public reluctance to reside in such houses. Using a qualitative approach is recommended as it allows for a deeper understanding of human perspectives and encourages participants to provide honest responses (Hennink et al., 2020).

#### Study Population and Sample

The study population consists of villagers of Kampung Pasir Salak, Perak. The researcher utilized purposive sampling, selecting five participants based on their willingness to participate and their relevance to the study question, including the Head of the village. This approach ensures that the data collected is meaningful and addresses the research objectives. The table below shows the list of participants for this study.

**Table 1: Participant's Demographic** 

Position	Age
Penghulu of Mukim Pasir Salak	45
Head Villager of Mukim Pasir Salak	72
Villager	83
Villager	47
Villager	35

#### **CASE STUDY**

Pasir Salak, located in Central Perak, Malaysia, is a historical district and mukim situated along the Perak River. On the opposite bank of the river lies the town of Kampung Gajah, while the Seberang Perak rice granary is located behind Pasir Salak. Pasir Salak is chosen as the case study due to its abundance of Malay traditional houses and its significance in terms of cultural and historical heritage. Therefore, conducting research in this area is deemed suitable.

#### DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection methods include library research, field research and on-site observation. Library research involves gathering information from various sources such as textbooks, academic documents (journals, conference proceedings, dissertations, research papers), and online sources. Meanwhile, for field research and on-site observation, this study employed face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method, with respondents selected based on the onsite condition case study in Pasir Salak, Perak.

The interview questions were written in English, but the interviews were conducted in participants' mother tongue (Malay) to ensure accurate responses, allowing them to share valuable insights in their native language. The responses were recorded, and later translated into English.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A set of interview questions was developed to acquire the necessary information for fulfilling the research objectives from the perspective of the villagers who are currently residing in the area, not from those who have left the village. The following sections present the findings and discussions obtained from the interviews conducted and tie with relevant literature sources.

#### The Major Challenges of Living in Malay Traditional Houses

Based on the interview findings, there are several challenges associated with living in Malay traditional houses with maintenance issues as a significant concern. Wood requires frequent refinishing, painting, and replacement, and is prone to termite damage (Carlson, 2018; Ki, 2019). Additionally, timber houses are vulnerable to fire accidents, with the potential for complete destruction in a short time. Respondents also highlighted the historical need to build traditional houses on stilts to avoid flooding in Pasir Salak, impacting the condition of the timber (Angkasa, 2017). Noise issues, such as creaking timber floors, were also mentioned. Safety concerns were also raised due to the need to climb high stairs and the presence of loose or squeaky timber floors.

#### Maintenance and Repairing Work

Respondents provided varying responses based on their individual plans and budget for repairing their houses. Two respondents mentioned the need for renovating and repairing their houses every 5 to 6 years. The majority of them indicated that they only address repairs when necessary, highlighting the durability of Malay traditional houses. According to Taylor (2000) and Moser & Korstjens (2018), timber is a durable material that does not spontaneously rot. However, the condition of timber that requiring repolishing and repainting and roof leaking were common issues mentioned, which respondents typically handle themselves. Respondents mentioned pest control as a crucial maintenance measure to prevent termite attacks. Timely repairs are also conducted to address defects and prevent further damage. Additionally, repainting and timber coating protection are employed periodically to enhance the appearance of the houses and maintain a clean and new look. These practices are vital to safeguard the condition of the timber houses (Ki, 2019) and ensure the longevity of the structures.

# The Abandonment of Malay Traditional Houses

One of the primary reasons for the abandonment of Malay traditional houses in Pasir Salak is the absence of heirs. This is attributed to children moving away from their ancestral homes and already owning their own houses. Frequent relocations, changing needs, and limited job opportunities in agriculture contribute to this trend.

Financial constraints and high repair costs relative to property value also discourage maintenance. These factors, along with the reluctance of subsequent generations to stay in the same house, result in abandonment and the preference for more affordable and modern housing options.



Figure 3: Abandoned House 2 (right view)



Figure 4: Abandoned House 2 (front view)



Figure 5: Abandoned House 3 (right view)



Figure 6: Abandoned House 3 (front view)



Figure 7: Abandoned House 4 (right view)

# The Preference between Malay Traditional Houses and Modern Houses

Out of the five interview sessions, four respondents preferred Malay traditional houses, citing reasons such as aesthetic value, sentimental attachment, comfort, and natural ventilation. Traditional Malay houses hold memories of their family's past, and the classic design matches their taste. The natural ventilation provides a cooling effect day and night. The raised floor and gaps in timber boards enable better airflow (Firrdhaus et al., 2015). One respondent opted for a combination of modern and traditional, highlighting the convenience and spaciousness of such a house.

#### **Modernizing Malay Traditional Houses**

Respondents mentioned renovating or adding modern house extensions for increased comfort and utilization of extra space as a kitchen, storage room, or additional bedrooms. Families with many relatives find modern extensions suitable and cost-effective, although it may diminish the authenticity of the traditional house. Additionally, maintaining the condition of the house becomes easier with these additions.

#### The Importance of Malay Traditional House Preservation

Preserving traditional houses is crucial for future generations as they represent the heritage and hold cultural value. Respondents emphasized the importance of these houses in showcasing Malay identity and culture. Values associated with traditional Malay houses play a significant role in conservation decision-making. Taking care of these houses honors our ancestors' trust in preserving the cultural legacy. Traditional Malay houses are a reflection of the Malay identity and should be treasured for their historical significance and unique designs. The respondents suggest that the younger generations should pay more attention to Malay heritage, especially the Malay traditional houses. Preserving historic buildings is crucial for passing on culture to future generations (Günçe and Mısırlısoy, 2019). While modern houses are preferred by younger generations, they should still respect Malay culture. Neglecting the heritage values in traditional Malay architecture may lead to a lack of interest and fading appreciation for these houses (Sulaiman et al., 2021). Those who inherit traditional houses are advised not to abandon them, but instead, consider renting them out or turning them into accommodations to benefit others and contribute to the local economy.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research study and interviews conducted, several conclusions can be drawn. Malay traditional houses offer unique design, excellent ventilation, and a strong sense of heritage and belonging. However, they also come with challenges

such as high maintenance costs, fire vulnerability, and potential safety concerns for children. The decreasing popularity of traditional houses is influenced by factors like modernization, limited job opportunities in the hometown, and the absence of heirs.

The following recommendations are proposed to promote the preservation and cultural value of Malay traditional houses:

- i) Encourage owners or agencies to preserve and maintain Malay traditional houses with financial incentives from the government.
- ii) Those who inherit traditional houses should consider renting or renovating them for the benefit of others if they prefer or need to live in a different house.
- iii) Advocate for the preservation of Malay traditional houses as heritage assets, emphasizing the need for systematic maintenance and scientific conservation of old timber to prevent abandonment.
- iv) Introduce Malay architectural heritage into school syllabi, making it an essential part of the curriculum for all generations to appreciate and preserve cultural heritage.
- v) Promote heritage culture through reality shows and influential hosts, increasing public interest in Malay traditional buildings and fostering a desire to learn more about them.

#### Recommendation for Future Research

To expand the research, it is important to include perspectives from individuals involved in construction and heritage management. Their insights and opinions will enhance the understanding of the topic. Besides, conducting a quantitative analysis on the preferences of younger generations can provide valuable insights for decision-making and the creation of culturally appropriate architectural designs.

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