

**Proceedings
Simpora XV**

The 15th Regional
Symposium of
The Malay Archipelago

A black and white photograph of a traditional wooden building, likely a historical structure in the Malay Archipelago. The building features a steep, ornate roof with intricate carvings and a balcony with a decorative railing. The architecture is characteristic of traditional Malay or Indonesian buildings. The image is positioned in the lower half of the page, below the title text.

Resilience of Culture & Symbolism in Built Environment

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE 15TH REGIONAL
SYMPOSIUM OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO**
SIMPORA XV: 2024

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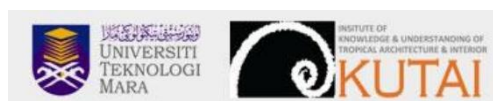
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THE EVOLUTION OF PLANTS AND LANDSCAPES IN TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSES OF RURAL PERAK

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Abstract: The transformation of traditional Malay house landscapes in rural Perak has become increasingly significant in light of rapid urbanization, socio-economic shifts, and environmental concerns. This study aims to analyze the evolution of plant selection and landscape changes within these dwellings. By examining both historical and contemporary practices, the research seeks to identify key plant species, their roles, and the factors influencing landscape transformations from years before 2010 to after 2020. Through field surveys, archival research, and interviews with local residents, the study investigates how traditional plant arrangements have adapted to socio-economic, cultural, and environmental shifts. Findings reveal that plants serve multiple functions, such as providing food sources, medicinal benefits, shade, and privacy, while also playing a role in cultural expression and environmental adaptation. Traditionally cultivated species include *Tapioca* spp., *Cocos nucifera*, banana trees (*Musa* spp.), and *pegaga* (*Hydrocotyle asiatica*). However, due to urbanization, economic pressures, and ecological concerns, plant selection and garden layouts have undergone transformations over time. This study further examines the socio-cultural and ecological factors influencing these changes, including modernization, the pandemic, and lifestyle shifts. The research emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional landscape elements to maintain cultural identity and promote environmental sustainability. By bridging past and present landscaping practices, this study provides insights into integrating traditional horticulture with contemporary rural development. Ultimately, this research contributes to understanding the interplay between traditional architecture and horticulture, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage and the creation of sustainable rural landscapes.

Keywords: plants, landscape, evolution, Malay, Rural Perak

INTRODUCTION

The changes in landscape typology reflect an ongoing evolution where the attachment to cultural traditions does not diminish the potential of plants to serve multiple, valuable roles within rural communities. Rather, these plants continue to play a crucial part in sustaining and enhancing key areas of rural life.

This research underscores the importance of recognizing and preserving traditional landscape elements as part of efforts to maintain cultural identity and promote environmental sustainability in rural Perak. By bridging past and present landscaping practices, the study provides insights into how traditional horticulture can be integrated with contemporary rural development, ensuring that the cultural and ecological values of these landscapes are preserved.

THE MALAY LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION

Traditionally, Malay houses in rural Perak were designed to harmonize with their natural surroundings. Gardens were not only functional, providing food and medicinal plants, but also aesthetically pleasing with ornamental species. Overstorey trees such as *Cocos nucifera* (kelapa) and *Mangifera indica* (mempelam) were commonly grown for their economic value, while understorey plants like *Pandanus amaryllifolius* (pandan) and *Murraya koenigii* (pokok kari) added to the household's self-sufficiency and aesthetic appeal.



Figure 1: Malay House and Landscapes Changes within Rural areas in Perak

However, the rise of urbanization in Perak, coupled with the increasing commercialization of agriculture, has altered the structure of these traditional landscapes. The demand for space in rural areas has led to smaller plots of land for planting, resulting in the decline of large overstorey trees. As more people seek to maximize their land for commercial crops, the landscape around Malay houses has become increasingly dominated by smaller, high-yielding plants such as vegetables, herbs, and fruit trees that cater to both subsistence needs and local markets.

Furthermore, the shift towards more modern agricultural practices has led to the introduction of non-traditional plant species, often cultivated for commercial purposes, which further transforms the local landscape.

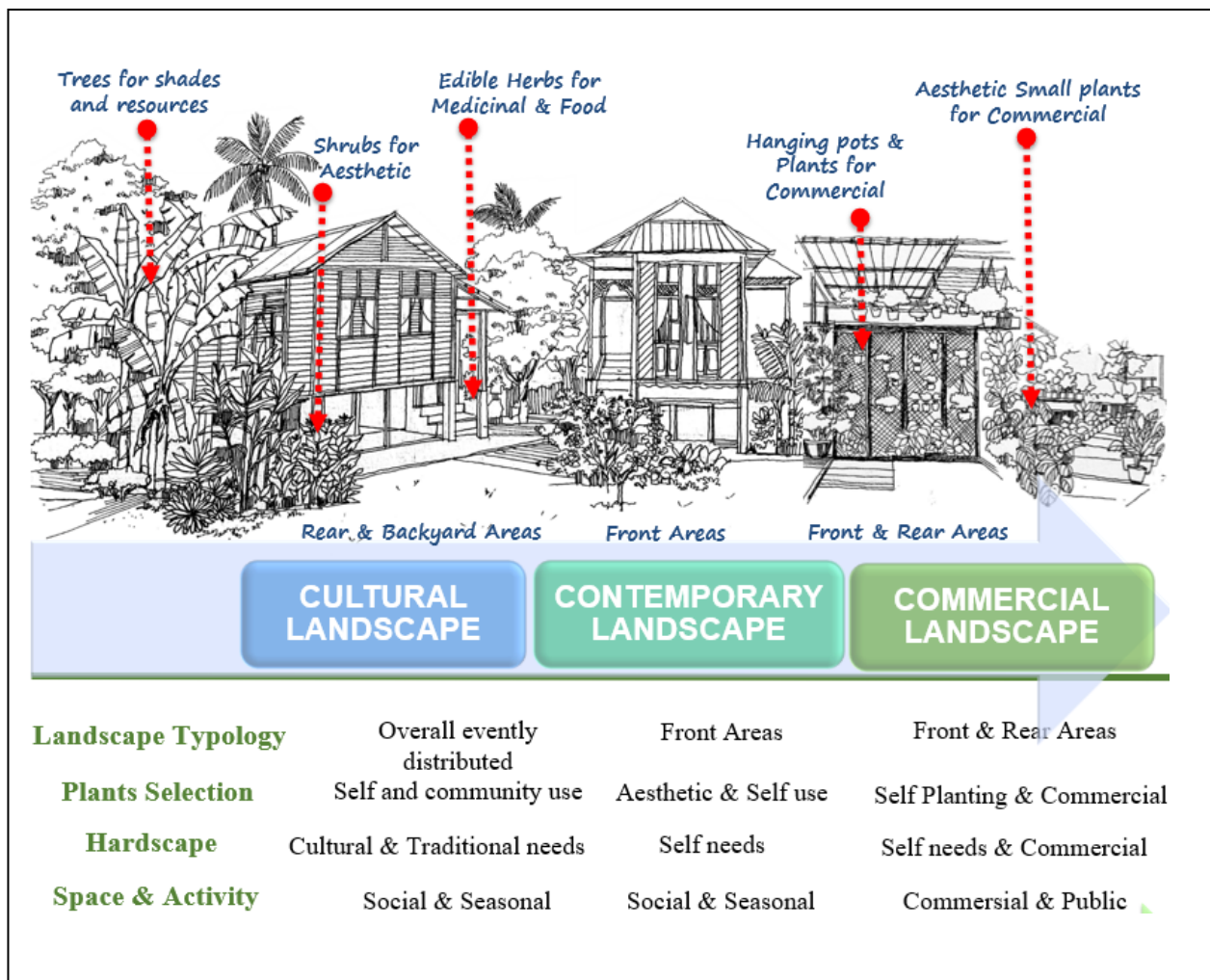


Figure 2: Analysis of Landscape Evolution of the Malay House Rural Perak

Nevertheless, the evolution in plants and landscape typology shows that landscape attachment with cultural-tradition does not diminish the plants' potentials and roles in sustaining: (i) high commercialization value, (ii) significant tourism opportunities, (iii) showcasing heritage identity, (iv) self-subsistence; and (v) boosting local economic benefits for future resilient.

PLANT SPECIES IN TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSES OF RURAL PERAK

The analysis illustrates that the commercial landscape has decreased in plants profile with only 10% of overstorey trees, 30% of understorey trees and the majority of 60% are the shrubs and herbs that serves as aesthetical, food and medicinal plants in fulfilling self and commercial demands.

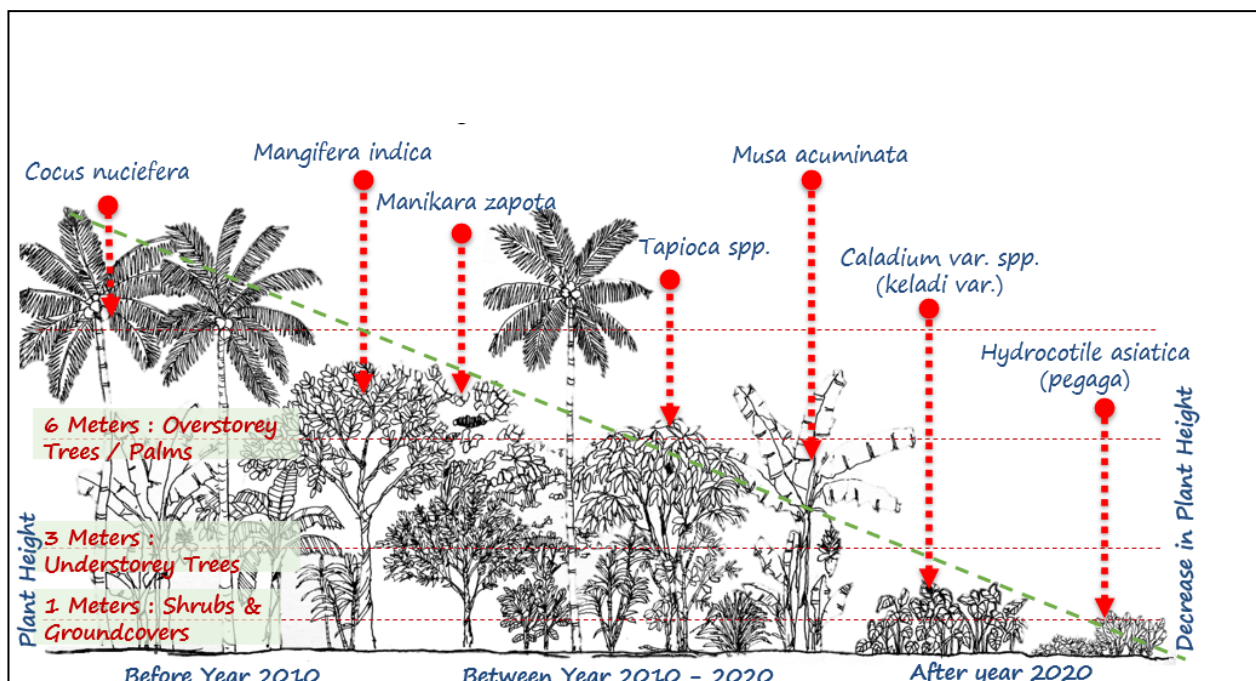


Figure 3: Plants Profile Analysis of The Malay Landscape in Rural Perak

The analysis reveals a significant shift in the landscape composition of rural Perak, highlighting a decrease in the diversity of plants traditionally associated with commercial landscapes. The study shows that the profile of plant species has undergone a transformation, where the once prominent overstorey trees now account for only 10% of the total plant species. These trees, which historically more than 6 meter height, provided critical resources such as timber, fruits, and materials for cultural practices, are becoming increasingly scarce as urbanization and modern land use practices take precedence.

In contrast, the proportion of understorey trees with the height between 1 to 3 meters has shown a significant increased, comprising 30% of the landscape plant profile. These trees, though less dominant than overstorey species, continue to serve vital roles in maintaining ecological balance by providing shade, supporting biodiversity, and offering various food and medicinal resources. While the understorey trees are still present, namely *Mangifera indica*, *Manikara zapota* and *Tapioca spp.*; their functions have shifted over time, influenced by changes in land use and the growing demands for more economically viable crops.

Interestingly, the largest shift in the plant profile is observed in the dominance of shrubs and herbs, which now make up 60% of the landscape. These plants are primarily valued for their aesthetic, food, and medicinal functions, meeting both self-subsistence and commercial needs. Shrubs and herbs, such as pandan leaves (*Pandanus amaryllifolius*), lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), and turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), continue to be integral to daily life in rural communities. These plants are not only essential for local consumption but also hold economic value through their commercial trade in local markets. These plants cater to the increasing demand for fresh, organic produce and herbal remedies, reflecting a shift in both consumer preferences and agricultural trends towards more sustainable, diversified plant use.

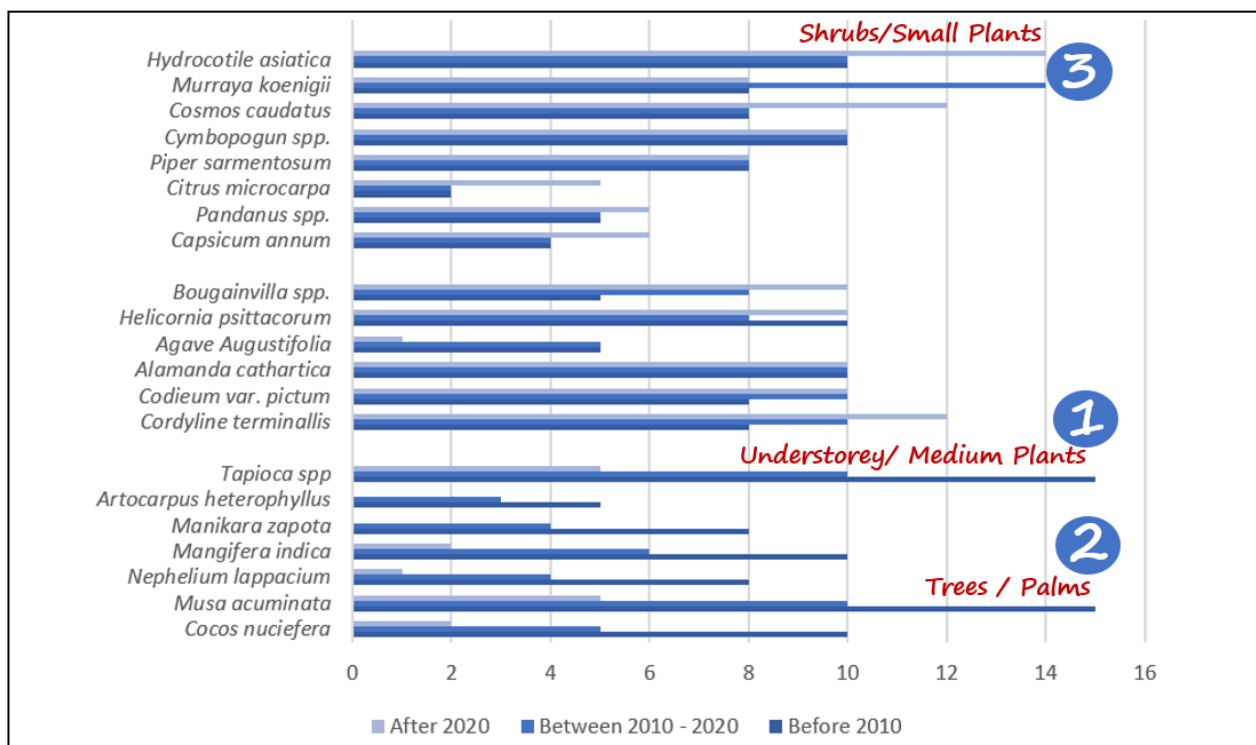


Figure 4: Plant Frequency in Landscape Profile between before year 2010 to after year 2020

Figure 4 illustrates the changing plant composition in rural Perak, reflecting shifts in landscape preferences and constraints. The dominance of shrubs and herbs represents a significant

departure from the traditional reliance on larger, high-value overstorey trees, indicating a broader trend towards smaller, more adaptable plant species. This shift is likely driven by several factors, including limited land availability for large-scale tree cultivation, the increasing commercialization of agriculture, and the growing demand for plants with diverse uses in food, medicine, and landscaping. The 2019 pandemic further accelerated this shift, as limited space led households to prioritize edible plants like *Hydrocotyle asiatica* (pegaga), *Murraya koenigii* (pokok kari), *Manihot esculenta* (ubi kayu), and *Musa acuminata* (pisang) for food security. At the same time, ornamental species such as *Cordyline terminalis* (jenjuang), *Allamanda cathartica* (bunga loceng), and *Codiaeum variegatum* (puding) remained popular, reflecting an ongoing balance between aesthetic values and practical needs.

While the reduction in overstorey trees and the rise of shrubs and herbs may reflect changing agricultural priorities and land-use patterns, it also highlights the evolving relationship between rural communities and their landscapes. These plants continue to serve crucial roles in maintaining the cultural identity of the region while meeting the growing commercial demands of a modern economy. The analysis demonstrates that despite the shift in plant types, traditional landscapes in rural Perak remain resilient, adaptable, and capable of fulfilling both self-sustenance and economic goals.

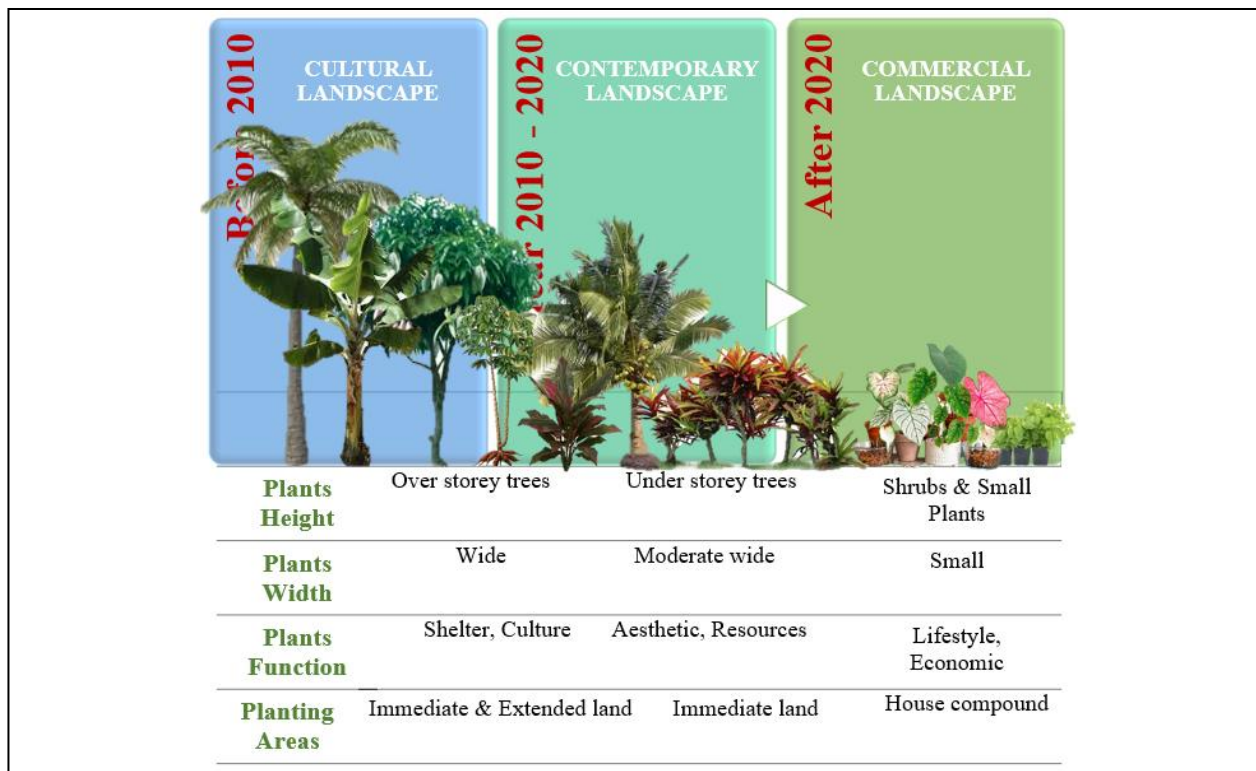


Figure 5: Summary of Plants Evolution of the Malay Landscape in Rural Perak

The plant evolution as summarise in Figure 5 shows a shift from large overstorey trees like *Cocos nucifera* (kelapa) and *Mangifera indica* (mempelam) to smaller, adaptable species such as *Cordyline spp.* and *Codiaeum variegatum* to *Hydrocotyle asiatica* (pegaga) and *Murraya koenigii* (pokok kari). These smaller plants, including edible species like *Manihot esculenta* (ubi kayu) and *Musa acuminata* (pisang), are increasingly favored due to their ability to thrive in limited spaces and serve multiple functions like food and medicine. In addition, the life changes during the MCO, has risen more decorative plants namely the *Caladium* species that portray vibrant foliage and ornamental value, as people sought to enhance their home environments. Thus, with reduced land availability, compact plants are now more common in home gardens, reflecting a trend toward practicality and adaptability in modern rural landscapes.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusions, understanding both cultural and contemporary changes provides valuable insights into the evolution of traditional Malay house landscapes in rural Perak. This study demonstrates that traditional plants and design elements remain vital, adapting to meet contemporary needs while preserving cultural heritage. As landscapes and culture are deeply intertwined with human life, they play a crucial role in fostering resilience and adaptability in future generations. Moving forward, the ongoing interaction between people and their environment will continue to shape and sustain the cultural landscapes of the Malay house in Perak, ensuring their relevance in a rapidly changing world.

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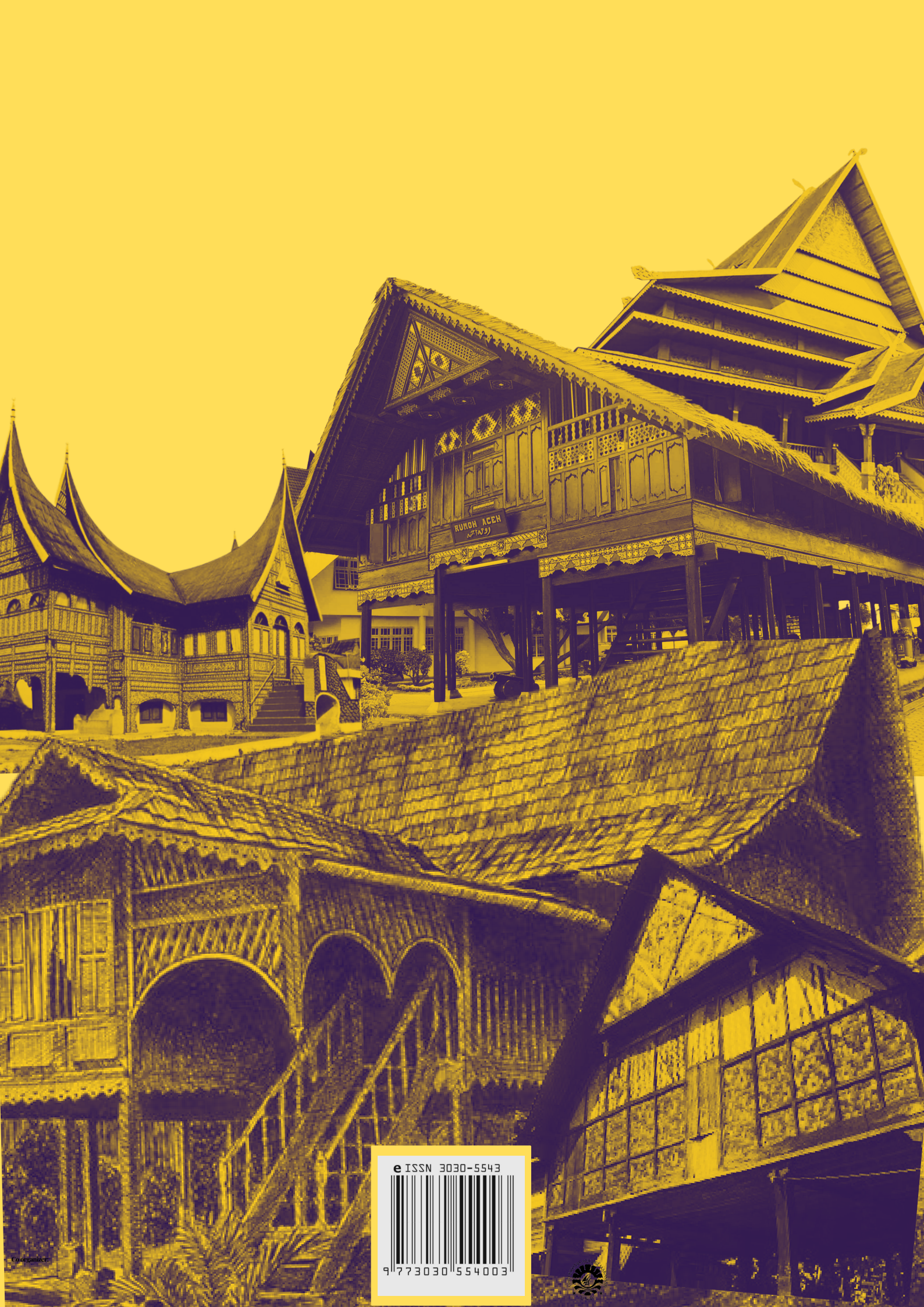
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