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SIGNIFICANCE OF SRIWIJAYA KINGDOM TO NEGERI SEMBILAN TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

This paper seeks to present the findings of a comprehensive literature review of the historical studies of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The study identifies the derived values from Sriwijaya Kingdom maritime culture hence their significance to the traditional architecture of Negeri Sembilan, hence further refines the methodology framework towards determining the authenticity. The research which this paper is based on aimed at analyzing the traditional architecture of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan. The methodology is qualitative. The literatures revealed that the Malays, known as the creators of ships, magnificent skills in sailing and navigational field proudly manifested this identity into their architecture.

Keywords: Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture; Sriwijaya; significance; maritime culture

1. Introduction

Understanding the traditional architecture within the Malay Archipelago in this case the Negeri Sembilan's, will requires a comprehensive literature reviews of the historical development of the South-East Asia region. The region's distinct cultural development known to has had happened since Neolithic times (Waterson, 2009). A time before the arrival of Islam but because of the archipelagic cultures of the Malay world, the Malay civilization later became the spreading center of Islam in the region. The arrival of Islam had refined the Malay civilizations. Hence Islam also further refined their culture, customs and architecture. The Malay civilization that gave root to the Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture must be studied within the history of the Malay Kingdoms in the South-East Asia and their significance is undeniable (Tate, 1979). Even Waterson realized that origin of such building style built with raised floors and elegantly curve roof-line must be traced back to the Southeast Asian prehistory. Malaysia and Indonesia are inseparable because they were part of historically acknowledged supreme, well respected maritime Nation of the Sriwijaya Kingdom (Hoyt, 1993), it's heir Melaka and the influential Majapahit Kingdom. Culture, customs, lifestyle and architectural identity are interconnected and an integral part of architecture which are continuously transformed and enriched along the historical periods (Widodo, 2005). What Widodo explained regarding the nature of the Southeast Asian Architecture such as diversity, eclecticism, fusion, acculturation and adaptations were very much in existence in the life concept of the Malay world or archipelago or Nusantara and Bumantra since the ancient (*kuno*) times. The evident is in the ancient Malay language, "binnika tunggal ika" which means "unity in diversity" and in current Malay language means *kepelbagaian dalam kesatuan* (Hitam, 2012; Waterson, 2009), a concept practiced long before the western countries ever invented the word and concept. Kato has brought forth to the world of the dynamism of the people in Southeast Asia region but he also made division of the Malay into two groups when discussing this matter, the Coastal Malay and the Inland Malay. The reason being, the Coastal Malay was more dynamic than the Inland Malays as they were often exposed to other cultures than the Inland Malays (Kato, 1997). Figure 1(a) and 1(b) indicates the location Negeri Sembilan and the Minangkabau's outlying frontiers (*rantau*) boundaries.

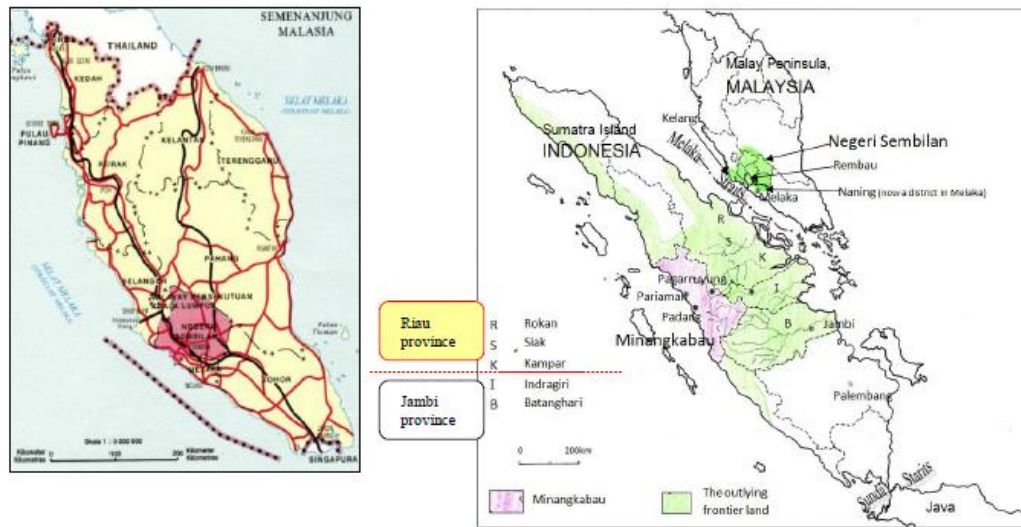


Fig. 1: (a) Map of Malaysia showing the location of Negeri Sembilan State; (b) Minangkabau's outlying frontiers .

1.1. Paper Objective

This paper seeks to present the finding of the comprehensive literature reviews of the primary data at phase 2 of the research methodology. Phase 2 is the gatherings data from primary and secondary sources. The primary data covers the historical aspects of the Negeri Sembilan specifically rooted from the Southeast Asia Malay Kingdoms and which will refine the methodology frameworks of the research. Refer to Figure 3.

1.2. The Research Aim and Site

The research is aimed at analyzing the Negeri Sembilan Traditional houses in the Luak (minor state) of Rembau in search of its authenticity. Rembau was chosen based on the significant historical events in the history of Negeri Sembilan.

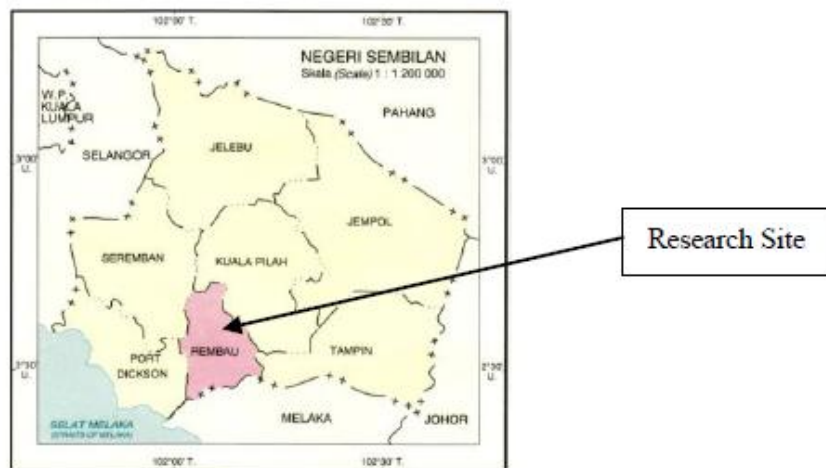


Fig. 2: Location of Rembau within the Negeri Sembilan state.

2. The Methodology

The research methodology was qualitative. It involved a comprehensive review of literatures leading to a better understanding of the relationship between the traditional architecture of Negeri Sembilan which formed an integral part of the Malay architecture in Southeast Asia through and the culture of the people within the kingdoms and empires maritime culture. The understanding of this relationship will form the basis to unravel the authenticity hence determining its most suitable context within the Negeri Sembilan communities.

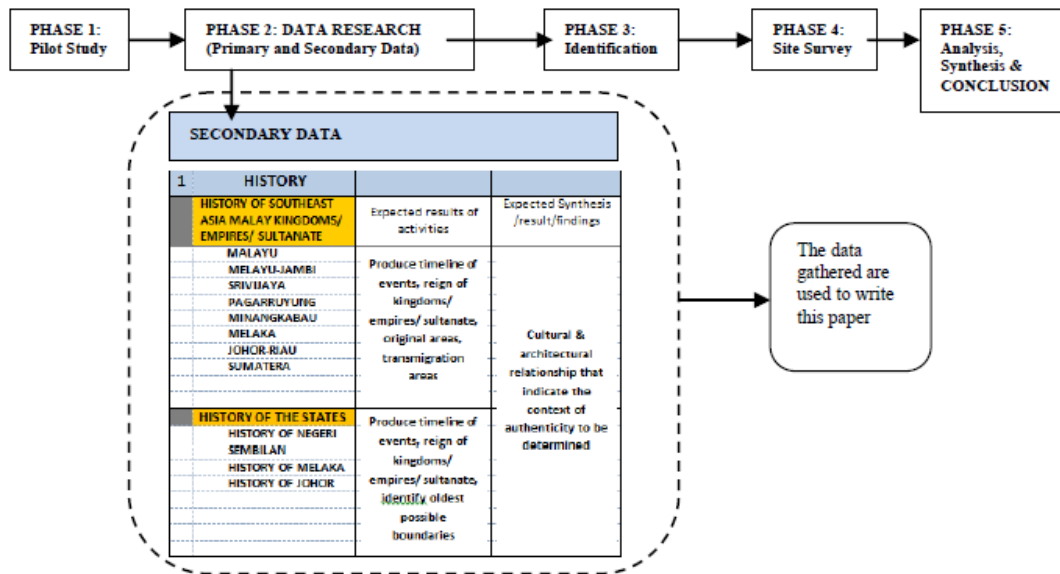


Fig. 3: The proposed scope of literatures required for reviews in the research proposal.

2.1. Research Limitations

Owing to the parameters set by the research grant, where funds are only for site activities (secondary data gatherings) within Malaysia, therefore any information and data regarding other countries within the current paper are totally dependent on the secondary data. Hence further research for primary data in Minangkabau heartland, Sumatra and Riau province, Sumatra would be required to further enhance the robustness of this research.

2.2. Originality/ Value

Most studies on Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture focuses on the historical aspects of the Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia and Minangkabau, Sumatra, which is the Minangkabau Kingdom. Here the attempt is made to investigate beyond and deeper into the Malay World (*Alam Melayu*) represented and manifested by the cultures of the ancient Malay Kingdoms in Southeast Asia hence understanding the origin of Negeri Sembilan and unravel the authenticity of their traditional architecture. This research paper is an important milestone to an ongoing research to study and determine the authenticity of Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture from the perspective of the Malay hence ensuring the preservation of their architectural and identity ownership.

3. Negeri Sembilan Traditional Architecture

The Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture is popularly link to their matrilineal culture known as *Adat Perpatih*, believe to have been brought solely by the Minangkabau people from West Sumatra. The already, existed matrilineal culture of the aborigines Malays in Negeri Sembilan (Idrus, 1996; Masri, 2012a), the Jakun, 'proto-Malay' communities (Gullick, 2003) now known as the Biduanda *suku* (clan) (Mohammad, 2011) were most of the

time forgotten. The matrilineal culture of the Jakun, however did not divide their communities into clans as did the Minangkabaus (Idrus, 1997; Masri, 2012b). The traditional Negeri Sembilan houses are known for their unique roof shape, where the roof's ridge-line have a 'slight curve upwards' ('*lentik*') being a visual representation of the 'kajang perahu' (Idrus, 1997; Masri, 2012b). Table 3 consists of the meanings of the words. Refer also to Table 1 for visual explanation.

However their historical link with the Minangkabau, mainly in terms of their ruler's bloodline, the assimilation of the Minangkabau leaders into the Biduanda's leader through intermarriages and two significantly major waves of transmigration into Rembau had caused misconceptions in the interpretations of the visual representation of the Negeri Sembilan traditional house roof shape to be from the shape of the 'buffalo horns'. The Minangkabau traditional architecture is famous for their saddle-back roof, with 'extreme upward curvacious roof ridge-line' ('*lengkung*'), being a visual representation of the shape of the 'buffalo horns' (Mursib & Mohamad, 1998; Idrus, 1996; Waterson, 2009 & 1998). The 'buffalo horns' identity of the Minangkabau spurs replacing their original kingdom name 'Pagarruyung' when they won independence through buffalo fight with the Majapahit army (Loeb, 1989; Navis, 1986 cited in Idrus, 1996).

In order to avoid misconception when referring to the Negeri Sembilan Traditional Architecture, Masri suggest that the Negeri Sembilan traditional houses are divided into two categories (Masri, 2012b):


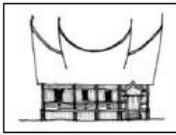

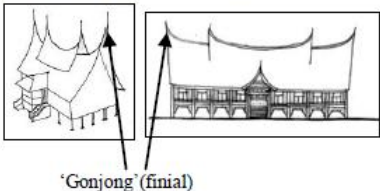
- 1) Negeri Sembilan Malay Traditional Architecture
- 2) Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau Malay Traditional Architecture

The author added the word 'Malay' in the second category in order for the reader to differentiate between the Minangkabau in West Sumatra.

3.1. Negeri Sembilan Malay Traditional Architecture

The Malay's of Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture main difference from the Minangkabau's traditional architecture is in the way how the roofs were built. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison between the roofs shapes of the Negeri Sembilan Malay and Minangkabau traditional architecture. Adapted from Masri, M. 2012b)

	Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional architecture	Minangkabau traditional architecture
Roof ridge-line at both gable (<i>tebar layar</i>) ends	Slight upward curve (<i>lentik</i>) 	steeper upward curves that bended inwards (<i>lengkung</i>) with extended ridge-line and resulting view at the elevation shows the gable ends roof shape protruded outwardly (outward-sloping gable-end) where the finial is called 'Gonjong' 
Roof construction	2-level roof/ levelled roof (<i>bumbung bertingkat</i>) 	layered roof (<i>bumbung berlapis</i>) 

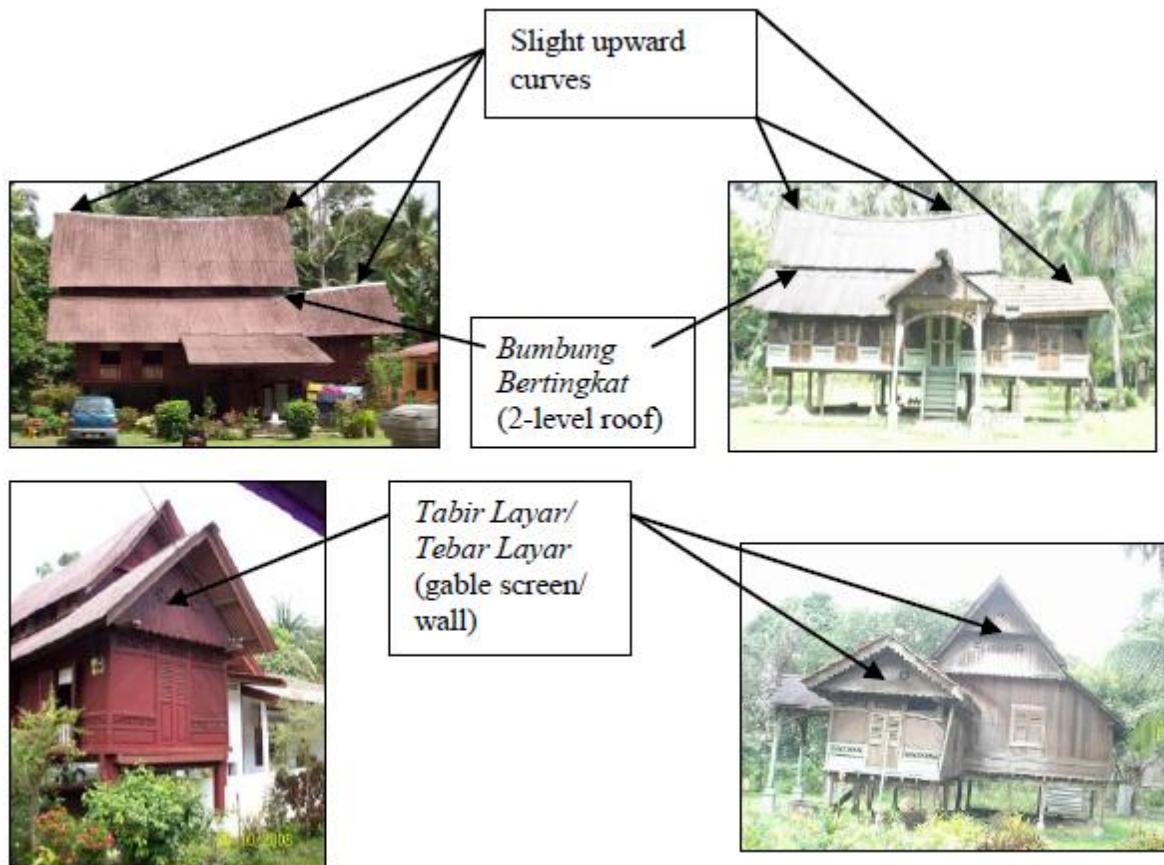


Fig. 4: Photographs showing the context of the terms leveled roof and gable end (tabir layar)

3.2. Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau Malay Traditional Architecture

The author will not go into details regarding the Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau Malay traditional architecture as the more authentic of the traditional is the Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional architecture. The interior spaces are similar but the author just would like to highlight the difference in the roof construction of the Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau Malay architecture represented by the layered roof.

4. Sriwijaya Kingdom: Supreme Maritime Kingdom

The 'binnika tunggal ika' life concept of the *Peradaban Melayu* (Malay Civilization) was the ones that had made the nation so innovative and creative that they were able to travel to and forth within the oceans in the world at any time that they desire. However according Tan Sri Mohd Yusoff Hitam the word 'civilization' does not accurately signify and represent the word 'peradaban'. The uniqueness of the fact that any kingdom that ruled, the people are free to *merantau* (transmigrate) within the archipelago without any barrier other than the moral practices and the social etiquette of the place being settled in the *rantau*. Further explanation regarding *merantau* is in Chapter 4.1. Within the family and social structure that place importance to the *hubungan serumpun* (intra nation's relationship) and the acceptance of certain similar social etiquette, rose a ruling system where the ruler's power were given by the people. Hence the 'indigenous democracy' had existed within the *Peradaban Melayu* within the Malay Archipelago even before the first century. Sriwijaya Kingdom at its peak was already implementing such government system. A few characteristics of this *peradaban* emerged reflected by the architecture of the buildings, such as the open *perundingan* (meetings, discussions and negotiations) between the people and rulers or their representatives.

The building for such *perundingan* is named *Balai* (hall of meetings) or *Gedung Sidang* were built without walls and anything may go in and out or take part other than the chosen leader by the communities or the ruling King (Hitam 2012). Tan Sri Mohd Yusoff Hitam statement further emphasized the uniqueness of the Malay nation maritime culture as adventurous nations, which then flourished during the Sriwijaya Kingdom:

“Within a rich environment, seas that flows across the Malay Archipelago, therefore it is not surprising the Malay sailors and seafarers were highly knowledgeable and highly skilled in navigational fields, especially in the ability in building ships that can sail across the straits and oceans (*samudera*) may it be near or far”.

Even the I-Tsing records stated that the Srivijaya port was able to produce large ships (Yew, C.W., Wan Iqmal, Chin & Ros Maria, 2008 cited in Masri, 2012a). Obviously the Malays during the Sriwijaya kingdom were already known for their skilled craftspeople in the field of creating things made of timber. An expert in timber crafts and arts in the Malay language, the expert was referred to as *tukang kayu* or *pandai kayu*.

Thomas writings further strengthened the fact that the Malay nations were the world’s supreme sea travelers. Interestingly the DNA research of the rats (*Rattus exulans*) that live within the Lapita communities had proven that the Malay nation have the technology to execute sailing expedition through extensive oceans and had the ability to perform return sails between the islands even when the island were out of sight (Thomas, 2011). Thomas cited Sheppard and Walter (2006) who acknowledged that the Malay nation showed effective strategy in executing sailing in the effort to find new settlements and had the magnificent ability to sail in two directions (during the same season or at any season) for trading and explorations. The reader must note that the ability to sail in both direction at any time were then not a navigational technology known to the Europeans, Middle East and the Chinese. Tate also admitted that they were skilled sailor (Tate, 1979). Sriwijaya supremacy of the maritime culture and sovereignty was also acknowledged by Hoyt who emphasized how the one thousand years period of their influence had allowed trade through the Straits to flourish, suppressing piracy (Hoyt, 1993). Widodo, his paper in re-examining Malay architecture also find it essential to emphasized) that the Malays were the creators of ships, who crisscrossed Indian and Pacific oceans, from Easter Island to Madagascar.

The Chinese were among the first to have written about the Sriwijaya Kingdom. Refer to Table 2.

Table 2: List of Chinese records regarding Sriwijaya

Time/Year	Source	Events
644 A.D.	Chinese reports/notes	A messenger (<i>perutusan</i>) arrived in China from Mo-lo-yeu in year 644 (Idrus, 1996)
671 A.D.	I-Ching’s expedition journals	Mentioned his visits to Srivijaya at Palembang, wrote that on his way to India, he stopped for a visit in Mo-lo-yu and Chieh-cha (Kedah) (Nik Abdul Rahman et. al., 2011)
685 A.D.	I-Ching’s expedition journals	Mentions his visits to Srivijaya at Palembang, wrote that on his way back to China he stopped again for a visit at Mo-lo-yu (Nik Abdul Rahman et. al., 2011)
695 A.D.	Chinese Royal edicts	Mentions ambassadors of Sriwijaya (Loeb, 1985)
1017 A.D.	Chinese Royal edicts	The Chinese wrote that who was at the time King of Sumatra (Srivijaya) sent ambassadors, letters and slaves to China. The treasures consist of clothing, ivory, and Sanskrit books (Loeb, 1985) Srivijaya was written as such because the Chinese called the King in Sriwijaya then as “Haji Sumatra bhūmi”, the king of land of Sumatra (Loeb, 1985).

The most important point to remember here is that, it is without doubt that communications through maritime trades had been established between the region of Negeri Sembilan (West central region) of the Malay Peninsula and the East central region (Riau province) of Sumatra (Masri, 2012a).

4.1. *'Transmigration' verses 'Migration'*

Many of the books or papers or articles written by the non-Malay authors referred to the dynamic, adventurous (Tate, 1979) and exploration culture of the Malays summarized by the 'merantau' being translated as 'migration'. They failed to understand the Malay point of view regarding their peradaban as explain in Chapter 4.0 by Tan Sri Dato' Mohd Yusoff Hitam. Therefore, the most accurate and most suitable translation to describe the Malay 'merantau' culture, of such population movement (Kato,1997) within their archipelago or Nusantara or Bumantra (Widodo, 2005) is 'transmigration'(Hitam, 2012). If a group of people in Beijing, China moved to settle in the Shanghai, China, be considered as migration? The answer is probably not, because it is still within China. So is, in the case of the Minangkabau people from western Sumatra who *merantau* and settled in the western coastal area of Malay Peninsula. Their transmigration is within the Sriwijaya Kingdom, Minangkabau Kingdom, Majapahit Kingdom, Melaka Sultanate and Johor-Riau Kingdoms. Apart from the kingdoms their rulers or royal bloodlines were also related (Masri, 2012a). Hence between Negeri Sembilan people and Minangkabau people of Western Sumatra, shared ownership not just only in their royal bloodline and kingdoms but also in their geological and ancestral (Zainuddin et. al, 2011; Masri, 2012a). In order to understand the transmigration culture of the Malays, the context of 'maritime culture' as so highlighted in depth by the author should be properly explained.

4.2. *Context of 'Maritime Culture'*

In relating the significance of the Sriwijaya Kingdom to Negeri Sembilan, it is essential to ensure that the context of 'maritime culture' used by the authors in this paper is properly understood by the reader. The word 'maritime' (when search using the Microsoft word program) is synonym with the words nautical, naval, seafaring, sea, oceanic and marine. Nurdiani associated the Sriwijaya Kingdom with seaborne trade (Nurdiani, 2005).

Among other similar components of a the Malay culture as stated by historians such as trading, customs, religions and belief, architecture, language, moral etiquette and the norms, the additional unique ingredient to the components was their knowledge and skills in navigational technology and the famous Malay 'diplomacy' which makes them daring explorers and successful seaborne traders.

Characteristics of most of the coastal and archipelagic Malays have the ability to sail, to navigate, obtain food from the seas or oceans, building various types of ships and boats for different functions.

The extent of their culture is self-explanatory through Lewis writings, stated that some of the navigational knowledge and skills that were passed down through the generations are the ability to seek for signs of living animals such as seabirds that feed at the sea during the day but having their habitat on land, the ability to observe reflected waves pattern (*pantulan ombak*) resulted from the waves collision with the islands far from the sights, the ability to recognize the reflection of the vegetation on the low clouds and their ability to read and interpret the charts produced by the stars (such as constellations etcetera)(Lewis, 1994 cited in Thomas, 2011).

4.3. The Settings

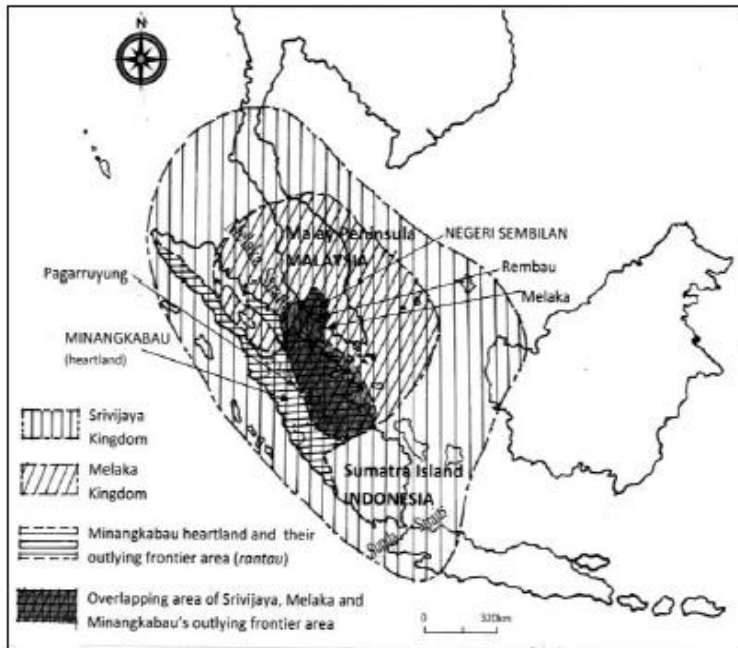


Fig. 5: The area whose imbedded culture were assimilated with the most number of the ancient Malay Kingdoms, especially Sriwijaya and Melaka.

These findings are very important as they will form the conceptual framework of the research, very concluding the findings during the site observation. Researchers will be able to observe certain similarities in the architectural identity within the area highlighted in Figure 4. Hence the research methodology will be refined based on the findings.

5. Significance to the Traditional Architecture of Negeri Sembilan

How did Negeri Sembilan embed within the Sriwijaya's maritime culture? Why is the 'maritime culture' of the Sriwijaya Kingdoms so important that the authors had explained in depth?

The obvious and undeniable answer is that architecture are spaces created out of social and its symbolic meanings, spaces that reflect and moulds the creators' and inhabitant's world view (Waterson, 2009). Architecture is the innate manifestation of culture. Architecture reflected, mirrors or expresses the community's identity and characteristic of the people who created it (Syed Ariffin, 2005). Architecture is reflection of the people's pride (Masri, 2012a).

5.1. Boats symbolizing identity

Waterson wrote that Vroklage concluded that the curve roofs with their pointed ends symbolized the boats of the bearer's culture. Vroklage named the curve roof as 'ship roof' as in his point of view, better signifies the 'true' meaning. He further supported his opinion by citing numerous examples of the Indonesian societies who compare their houses or villages to boats, however Waterson did not specifically state the words which he cited (Waterson, 2009). It is interesting to find that Waterson considered Vroklage's article in 1936 titled "The ship in the Megalithic Cultures of South-East Asia and South Seas" as dubious. Probably this opinion was based from a western origin individual, whereas to a Malay origin researcher the connection seemed logical and the right path towards understanding Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture specifically and the Malay architecture generally.

In contrast to being named ‘saddle-back roof’ by the European researchers seemed out of place within the Malay culture. With so many obvious similarities between the boats and the architecture, it is odd the find that interest in the boat symbolism are remarkably lacking when studying the traditional architecture. In the Negeri Sembilan context the curve roof of their traditional houses is probably more suitably called the ‘boat roof’.

5.2. Terms of the traditional architectural components

Any anthropological approach in understanding architecture includes understanding the local language within the culture and the language group such as Austronesian. Waterson found that language provides one of the most important clues to the underlying historical and cultural ties which bind the people of Southeast Asia. Hence even writers of subjects related to the Malay traditional architecture Nasir and Wan Teh, Idrus, Abdul Rashid and Ahmad Dawa, Nurdiani, studied the language used for the architectural components and elements. The terms should and may also reflect the identity, the pride of the people. In Malay traditional architecture, as well as in the Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture the terms used is very much related to their ancestral culture. So is the case with the Minangkabau people in Western Sumatra, the mainland Riau people in the Riau province in Eastern Sumatra. The traditional Minangkabau houses roof’s ridge-line shape are popularly interpreted as the visual analogy of the buffalo horns shape that is link to the event where they won independence from the Majapahit Kingdom through buffalo fight. The degree and type of curves of the Minangkabau traditional buildings were also visual analogy of other nature’s shape such as a day’s old crescent, bamboo shoots and the scorpion tweezers, but the buffalo horns shape overshadows the other visual analogy. In the case of Riau traditional architecture, the roof form named the *lontik* roof is the visual representation of the *Lancang* (traditional boat) (Idrus, 1996; Nurdiani, 2005). Similarly in the case of Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture, the long roof type’s form with slight upward curve ridge-line (*tulang perabung*) at both side of the gable end were a visual representation of the *kajang perahu* (Idrus, 1996). Refer also to Table 3. Riau and Negeri Sembilan were both regions that were under the sovereignty of Sriwijaya, Minangkabau, Melaka and Johor-Riau kingdoms, all the significant kingdoms in the Malay history with maritime culture.

Therefore it is not a coincidence that their architectural components should reflect or be named after the Malay traditional boats or ships. When studies about the Negeri Sembilan people’s traditional architecture and their historical socio-cultural is done concurrently, such similarities are noticeable. Unraveling the authenticity of Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture the literature opens layer by layers of new perspective about the traditional architecture and one of the layers is within the linguistic perspective. The authors of this paper are no linguist, but found it essential to have basic understanding of some of the many meanings of the terms involved within the context. Table 3 is the list of the most common similarities regarding the terms used for the components of the Negeri Sembilan traditional house and the Malay traditional boat named *perahu*.

Table 3. List of similar terms for the perahu and traditional house components

	Terms/words	Definitions/ meanings	
		<i>perahu</i>	Negeri Sembilan Malay Traditional house
1	<i>Tabir layar</i> (<i>tebar layar</i>)	The flying sails (Nasir & Wan Hasyim, 2011).	The gable-end wall or screen (Mursib & Mohamad, 1998;)
(a)	<i>Tabir</i>	Not applicable	Fabric curtain or screen usually fixed at the window, door or opening. Also called <i>tirai</i> .
(b)	<i>Layar</i>	The thick fabric used as the sail.	Not applicable
2	<i>Kajang perahu</i>	the back (<i>buritan</i> or <i>belakang</i>) of the Malay boat (<i>perahu</i>) that is covered with <i>kajang</i> (covering materials made out of the nipah leaves or mengkuang leaves or bamboo etcetera.) to protect from the heat or other climatic elements.	The visual representation of the roof ridge-line shape of the Negeri Sembilan Malay Traditional house.
3	<i>Serambi</i>	A space within the <i>perahu</i> (Malay traditional boat) at the front area, mostly known as <i>langkan</i> .	The interior space at the front connected to the main house (<i>rumah tengah/ rumah ibu</i>), the floor most of the time lower than the main house used as a reception for the male guest, and during functions etc. Also called <i>selasar</i> (especially in the Riau province)
(a)	<i>Langkan</i>	A space within the <i>perahu</i> (Malay traditional boat) at the front area.	<i>Serambi</i> that is without the walls (at the house)

Conclusion

The findings proved and refined Idrus conclusion and is in agreement with Vroklage suggestion regarding the role of ships in the Malay architecture, Negeri Sembilan specifically in this research. The conclusion of this paper has enable the researcher decide the point of period in the history to determine ‘authenticity’ of the Negeri Sembilan traditional house. Based on the conclusion from Figure 5 therefore the methodology framework should also include some comparison with Riau traditional architecture.

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