TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSE COMPOUNDS THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

The study on ethnicity can be carried out through exploration on their literature, religion, life style, culture, architecture and landscape. To understand the mind and thoughts of an ethnic or a community, architecture and its surrounding environment can be regarded as an influential instrument in research. Thus, the association between man and environment or between man and nature signified the physical characteristics of a place or its landscape. The landscape evolved through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, family, or a community. The landscapes reflect the physical, biological, and cultural character of those everyday lives and shaped those surrounding as what we called as Vernacular Landscape. This study discusses the development and characteristics of the traditional Malay house compounds in Peninsula Malaysia. Based on anthropologists and geographical setting, the location of traditional Malay villages can be classified depending on the level of topography such as uphill or foothill and lowland or highland which also marks the upstream and downstream of a river. The
term Orang Bukit, Orang Sawah and Orang Laut were used to determine the difference between those villages where the traditional houses were located. Twenty-four (24) houses were selected as case studies from all over Peninsula Malaysia to represent every categorization. Through site observations, data collection on the distribution of landscape elements was developed and analyzed. The study found that there are similarities and dissimilarities on the distribution of landscape elements among all the traditional houses. The results contribute to the enrichment of discussion and theory development of Malay landscape design. The transmissible of the traditional Malay culture as well as landscape garden elements can offer guidelines towards understanding the concepts of the Malay garden and the authenticity of the traditional Malay landscape. The findings of this study could contribute towards developing the conception of landscape design in Malaysia.

Key words: Cultural Landscape, Vernacular Landscape, Malay Garden, Malay Landscape


1. INTRODUCTION
Architecture, socio-culture and its environmental surrounding gave an impact to the characteristic of a place. This study aim to investigate the environmental surrounding or its landscape elements factor as determination point in developing the making of a place. The study mainly focused on the traditional Malay landscape design and their characteristics in Peninsula Malaysia. With referring to the Malay community as specific ethnic group of people this study focused on the Malay traditional house compound of selected villages. The selection of traditional houses from the selected villages and its categorization were made based on anthropologist and geographical setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
The use of mobile app has been getting significant in the present decade. With the Cultural geographer Carl Sauer coined the term, “cultural landscape” in 1925 and explained it in the following terms; “culture is the agent; the natural area is the medium; the cultural landscape the result.” The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) divided Cultural Landscape into four:

i. Designed Landscapes

ii. Ethnography Landscapes

iii. Historic Sites

iv. Vernacular Landscapes

For this particular study it is fall under the Vernacular Landscape. According to TCLF, Vernacular Landscapes are landscapes that evolved through usage by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped those landscapes. Through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, family, or a community, the landscapes reflect the physical, biological, and cultural character of those everyday lives. Landscape refers both to a way of viewing and appreciates the environment surrounding us, whether of aesthetic value or not, provide the setting for our daily life everlasting; well-known as major acquaintances between people and nature and recognizing their interaction with the environment (Mitchell et al., 2009). The George Wright
FORUM (2000), appealing the idea of landscape is that it unites the factors at work in our relationship with the surrounding environment. The very notion of landscape is highly cultured, and it may seem redundant to speak of cultural landscapes; but describing the term ‘cultural’ has been added to express the human interaction with the environment and the presence of tangible and intangible cultural values in the landscape.

This study mainly focuses on the Malay community. Stamford Raffles, “On the Malayu Nation”, Asiatic Researcher (1816) consider that the Malay as a Malay nation, one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states living between Sulu Seas and Southern Oceans; Malayu nation as one person. The Malays are the race of people who inhabit the Peninsular Malaysia and portions of adjacent islands of Southeast Asia, including the east coast of Sumatra, the coast of Borneo as well as smaller islands that lie between these areas. While the anthropological treatises of Johann and Bendyshe (1865) classify Malay as a variety and clearly defined base on the faces. The colour of the hair is black, curly, soft and plentiful with the moderately narrowed head, an upper jaw with the large shape of the mouth as well as thick and full nose as it were diffuse and lastly sufficiently prominent and distinct from each other.

Institute of Language and Literature, Malaysia (2015) state that Malay is a person, (orang) Melayu; 2. (Language) Bahasa Melayu or Malay is the name of a nation and language (especially in Peninsular Malaysia); (a) Malay way of life; (b) Muslim; spoke in Malay language; making the character or show the characteristics of Malay: ~ Malay traits or characteristics that show the personality of the Malays: traditions and customs of his ~; those who want the preferred as well as the original name of the people who live in the region of the area of the archipelago in Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and East Timor).

Abdullah and Nakagoshi (2006) declare that the definition presented by Pelras (1989) in the field of anthropology and architecture is the most suitable for the basic concept and definition about Malay because it is specifically referring to the area along Peninsular Malaysia. The Malays are defined through their ethnicity, the environment of their daily life as well as their background and the intermediate language.

2.1 Classification of the traditional Malay community

Studies by Ani et al. (2012) also support that the cultural landscapes of the Malays specifically originate from the surrounding region of the Malay Archipelago especially Indonesia, which were one of the earliest settlers of the Malay Peninsula. Along with this migration, the Malays brought with them their traditional cultural values as well as wisdom as they settled on the coasts and hinterland whilst embedding their cultural and lifestyle. Speaking from these, the level of documentation, based on research as well as influence from others, the philosophy, opinions and point of views of an anthropologist from Indonesia namely Jakob Sumardjo was adapted for this study.

In summary, Jakob Sumardjo is a historian as well as a former lecturer at the Indonesian Dance Institute, Bandung, West Java. A freelancer writer of literary criticism and cultural articles for several mass media as well as written more than 20 books about Indonesian cultural and literature. According to Jakob (2006), the traditional Malay community in Indonesia which are similar in Malay Peninsula influenced by the power of relations with the surrounding environment. Armed with the hermeneutics controlled, Jakob’s classifies the meaning of the intellectual culture (poetry, folklore, manuscripts etc.) are made from the material culture (painting, costumes, dances, musical instruments etc.) and influenced by the character of their surrounding environment of daily life.
Classification of the traditional Malay community for this study are based on the analytical approach that constructed to characterize the elements of the traditional Malay landscape design and their daily life activities by geographical setting as well as the location of their traditional house. Geographical aspect is seen based on their level of topography namely lowlands and wetlands, foothills, and near a fishing ground as a sample for this study in Peninsula Malaysia. Ahmad (2013) also mention that the important contribution to cultural landscape studies based on influence from surrounding environment such as topography which in turn leads to a different of daily activities. Besides, cultural geographers also take the point of view that by shifting and transfer the information related to the cultural landscape give a more theoretical as a whole is affected by the relationship between humans and their environment directly.

Jakob (2006) classifies the traditional Malay community in Indonesia into four groups of paradox based on hermeneutics (the philosophy and methodology of text/interpretation for understanding human nature), aesthetic paradox (taste on art) and cultural anthropology. They conclude that the taste on art came when we always practice our own tradition as a boundary in every single daily activity. The groups of the community which classify namely *Estetika Pola Dua*, *Estetika Pola Tiga*, *Estetika Pola Empat*, and *Estetika Pola Lima*. But, for this study, only three groups that are adopted in accordance with the geographical setting which are *Estetika Pola Tiga* known as *Orang Bukit*, *Estetika Pola Empat* known as *Orang Laut* as well as *Estetika Pola Lima* which is known as *Orang Sawah*.

**a) Orang Bukit** (literally Hills People)

According to Jakob (2006), *Estetika Pola Tiga* composed of primordial community living and practices in dryland farming around the foothills and valleys. The farmers are those who are farming in dry fields in hilly areas including paddy fields (known as *padi huma*) and water resources are dependent on rainfall and water catchment. Consisting of groups of people who are holding fast to the culture and beliefs of worldly rather than the life after death. Dominated by the community from ethnic Minang, Batak, Malay, Nias, Mentawai, Dayak as well as Central Madura, Southeast Nusa, South Maluku, North Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi and South Sulawesi where most of the area are located in a hilly area with the undulating sloping terrain.

In the contacts of this study, generally, *Orang Bukit* refers to the people who live and built their traditional Malay house in the foothills area along the traditional Malay villages in Peninsular Malaysia nowadays. The natural and cultural environment visually perceived by experts and layman as well as obviously gives the clear impression of the traditional Malay way of life. Comprise the state of Kedah, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, Johor and Pahang.

**b) Orang Laut** (literally Sea People)

According to Jakob (2006), *Estetika Pola Empat* composed of a community who live in or nearby coastal areas as well as small islands around Indonesia. Daily practice with competition between each other’s along with the way of life entirely depends on the sea and soil fertility. Divided into two main parts, upstream (*hulu*) and downstream (*hilir*) with sticking to their tradition and cosmological relations between man itself with the surrounding environment (soil, rock, sky, rain and sea). Includes Sumatra, Sunda, Java, Bugis, Aceh, Makassar, East Nusa Tenggara and South Maluku.

According to Anthropology & the Human Condition (2016), *Orang Laut* commonly referred to the group of traditional Malay community in the Southeast Asian region, originally from the Spice Islands in Indonesia and migrated all the way here and compromise several clans spread over numerous coastal regions in Southeast Asian region such as Southern Thailand, Burma, peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. This community also addressed by others as ‘Sea Nomads’ and ‘Sea Gypsies’ as well an animistic with regard to their belief. They
generally depend on fishing and the acquisition of other marine life for a living along with skilled in carving and developing traditional boat.

For the uniformity with what has been classified by Jakob Sumardjo above, *Orang Laut* for this study refer to the traditional Malay people who live and built their traditional Malay house near the fishing ground nowadays but they are not only depend on the marine product wholly as a daily source. They also rely on other agricultural resources. As mention before, the natural and cultural environment visually perceived by experts and layman as well as obviously gives the clear impression of the traditional Malay way of life. Comprise the state of Penang, Selangor, Melaka, Johor and Terengganu.

c) **Orang Sawah** (literally Padi Field People)

According to Jakob (2006), *Estetika Pola Lima* composed of people who practice the way of life especially in the production of rice and live in the lowlands area. The culture of the community who practice with the paddy fields at lowlands area is totally different with the upland rice farmers. They usually carry out mixed agricultural activities and live in the hills area. Jakob Sumardjo also put that the pattern of the lifestyle for *Estetika Pola Lima* people as a society full of vitality by holding fast to their tradition and cosmological sequentially and covers all aspects of their life between man and nature along with customs, taboos, architecture, garden elements, technology and creativity that belong to their traditions.

As a constant, the classification of *Orang Sawah* for this study refer to the traditional Malay people who live in traditional Malay villages and built their traditional Malay houses next to paddy fields as well as the traditional house that is located at the lowlands or flat area along Peninsular Malaysia. The natural and cultural environment visually perceived by experts and layman as well as obviously gives the clear impression of the traditional Malay way of life. Includes the state of Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Melaka, Pahang and Kelantan.

The connectivity and the integration of the each community that classified by Jakob Sumardjo in the assessment groups of paradox based on the hermeneutics of art and nature along with the cosmological of their way of life is very important as its holistic approach. Traditional landscape design and principles cover all components (landscape elements, landscape functions, landscape structure, and landscape change) as well as the aspect from the surrounding environment such as nature, topography, social, customs and economic factors (Hussain & Ahmad, 2017; Baharum; Mohd Nasir, 2016; Zakaria et al. 2014; Ani et al. 2012; Abdullah & Nakagoshi, 2006; Ismail & Hussien, 2005; Yuan, 1987).

### 2.2 Traditional Malay Villages in Peninsular Malaysia

Hood Salleh (2008) in *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia, Peoples and Traditions*, the classification of traditional Malay villages and their community or people along Peninsular Malaysia frequently referred by anthropologist with a variety of terms since the 16th century. Some of these terms have were descriptive of their abode; such as *Orang Hulu* (people of the headwaters), *Orang Darat* (people of the hinterland), and *Orang Laut* (people who live by the sea). Although the beliefs, culture and customs of each ethnic group are different, but the way of life, as well as their development of landscape design for each community in general, is same as follows their atmosphere and geographical aspect.

As mention before, the study of the traditional Malay community considered as a static morphology and the approach used to describe their routine are based on the process of their daily life activities (Ali, 1981; Abdullah & Nakagoshi, 2006; Omar & Atoma, 2009; Zakaria et al. 2014). Primarily, the routine and the process of the daily life activities is considered based on their surrounding environment as well as geographical setting adding with their traditions. The term primarily used by anthropologists to describe what happens when the locals take something from the outside and make it their own that may highlight and relevant in the present
environment. For the purpose of this study, traditional Malay community was selected based on their geographical setting which means the placing of their house on what type of topography. Rahman et al. (2015) believe that almost all traditional Malay villages, as well as the rural landscape in Peninsular Malaysia, are geographically diverse. The diverse refer to the level of topography which is lowlands and wetlands, foothills, and near a fishing ground either the river or the sea. In a recent study of reaction times, Hussain & Ahmad (2017); Rahman et al. (2015); Ahmad, (2013), as well as Ismail & Hussein (2005), described that the natural landscape of Peninsular Malaysia mainly covered by coastal and forest area. Besides this area, rice cultivated fields were to be found especially in the state of Perlis, Kedah, and Perak in the north-western region of the peninsular as well as lowlands near to the foothills. Meanwhile, palm oil plantations, rubber plantations, coconut groves and others cultivated area were mainly found in the foothills scattered along the peninsula from the south to the north and east coast region. The characteristics of the natural setting with the diverse topography and their traditional landscape which traditionally was inherited in daily living as well as the setting of the elements in their landscape design development.

Among the local scholars and anthropologists who are studying and collecting the information related to the way of lives of the early or traditional Malay community as well as indigenous people in the Malay Peninsula is like Nik Hassan Suhaimi, Wan Hashim Wan Teh, Hasan Mat Nor, Hood Salleh, July Edo and Mohd Tap but the point of classification on the geographical aspect are still vague. But then again, they are all agreed with the statement that all the Malays are traditionally a rural people and they still represent the majority of the agriculturally dependent population. They are mainly farmers, breeder, paddy planters, and rubber smallholders and on the east coast, many are fisherman.

Figure 1 Distribution of the Classification Groups of the Community Adapted from Anthropologist Jakob Sumardjo and to be tailored to the Needs of this Study for Every 11 States in Peninsula Malaysia.

(Source: Author, 2018)
3. METHODOLOGY

The functional ability of the characterization for the traditional Malay landscape design is determined by the analysis of the spatial structure (traditional Malay house compound through observation to the Malay villages in Peninsula Malaysia) as well as their surrounding environment. According to Hussain & Ahmad (2017), a structured method in analyzing and evaluating landscape in an integrated framework on land use management is still absence and the challenge in landscape is to develop a quantitative assessment method for valuing impact on landscape and the elements of an overall composition. Thus, the initial reflection on the importance of the location of the site as well the immensity chosen were wide as to ensure that the sites contains diverse opportunities to be explored with ranging issues affecting the development of traditional Malay landscape design in Malaysia.

The selection of the samples precisely, defines and describes the current situation in an appropriate environment to show the similarity of the cultural components contained there. To obtain the uniformity of data that were collected and evaluated, each sample based on their geographical setting and groups in the community was divided consistently by the zoning which is eight (8) numbers per community (Figure 2 & 3). *Orang Bukit* through the Northern Zone with the fractions of three (3) numbers, mostly at Batu Kurau, Perak; none of the Central Zone because the study only covers part of Kuala Selangor which is flat land and near to the fishing ground as well as most Malays perform in fisherman activities and rice cultivation. Southern Zone with the three (3) numbers and East Coast Zone with the total numbers of two (2). *Orang Sawah* with the total numbers of four (4) at the Northern Zone; none for the East Coast Zone and both in the total numbers of two (2) for Central and Southern Zone. Meanwhile, *Orang Laut* with the same fractions; two (2) numbers for each zones.

![Diagram of Traditional Malay House](image)

**Figure 2** Traditional Malay House Distinguished by the Groups of Local Community based on their Geographical Aspect

Note: Classified and specific for the purpose of this study only – research gap
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data from the case studies that were carried out in stages in order to clarify the implementation of the current traditional Malay landscape design approaches based on geographical setting and groups of community along Peninsular Malaysia. However, some constraints identified, and the data from the first observation are not too strong to support and achieve the objectives as well as related back to the literature review. The range of current trend and issues that clarified also play are a vital role to give evidence that the Malay landscape design concept nowadays have lost essential values of their traditions due to human influence and modernization.

Table 1: The Examples of the Distributions of the Landscape Typologies and Attributes by Zoning and Groups of Community along Peninsular Malaysia

| Landscape Typologies and Attributes through Geographical Settings and Groups of Community (Traditional Malay House Compounds) |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| NORTHERN ZONE (Perak, Penang, Perlis & Kelantan) | CENTRAL ZONE (Selangor) | EAST COAST ZONE (Pahang, Terengganu & Kelantan) | SOUTHERN ZONE (Johor, Melaka & Negeri Sembilan) |
| NZ | L03 - Selangor | EZ | L07 - Kelantan |
| NZ | S01 - Perlis | ORANG SENAH | ORANG LATA |
| NZ | S04 - Penang | ORANG SENAH | ORANG LATA |
| CZ | S05 - Selangor | ORANG SENAH | ORANG LATA |
| CZ | L08 - Terengganu | ORANG LATA |
| CZ | S08 - Malacca | ORANG SENAH | ORANG LATA |

1 Note: **Ae** - Aesthetic Values | **He** - Herb and Food Plants | **Fr** - Fruit Plants | **Bt** - Big Trees/Shade Trees | **FC** - Front Compound | **SC** - Side Compound | **RC** - Rear Compound
Traditional Malay House Compounds Through Anthropologists and Geographical Settings

As shown from the Table 1, the distribution of the landscape elements between each zone are quite similar but maybe have different characters based on their groups of community adapted from their geographical setting and successfully applied in respect of their cultural tradition and Malay cosmologies. For examples, front compound recognized by its ample space for the gathering, special occasions and ceremony as well as a public space and give the sense of welcome, it is full of aesthetic landscape elements.

Side compound either on the left or the right side of the house compound functions as an intermediate space between the front compound and rear compound. Landscape elements within this compound commonly clustered placing typically practice as a barrier to limit the unwanted view from the public through front compound directly to the rear compound. While rear compound determined as a private area and the visitor are not welcome to enter without permission from the residents. Commonly used for the kitchen activities and livestock. Landscape elements associated with this compound including reban, jamban, bangsal and space for trash disposal (perun) along with a small orchard, kitchen garden or edible garden.

5. CONCLUSION

In general, the traditional Malay house compound nowadays is being slowed in its role as a part of the conservation of vernacular heritage. From the case studies analysis, sense of place are not just related to the physical aspects but also associated and linked to the activities and meanings. House compound will acquire a clear identity if they are spontaneously used for daily routine and regular activities as well as retain and generate distinct meanings between tradition and cultural associations.

As mention before in literature review, the judgments concerning meaning and memory stated by Mohd Nasir (2012) are totally precise where the lengths of time, cultural influences as well as the identity of peoples, can be measured from the existed of the traditional vernacular elements associated in the house compound. It is also clarify that the statement made by Husain & Ahmad (2017) is verifiable where the influence, importance, and needs within the relationships between internal and external spatial living context displaying the origin theory of the man and nature relationship. The typologies and the distribution of landscape elements served the daily needs, personality as an image, social interaction activity as well as the demands of living and survival.

Table 2: The Similarities and dissimilarities on the distribution of landscape elements among all the traditional houses by Zoning and Groups of Community along Peninsular Malaysia

| Landscape Typologies and Attributes through Geographical Settings and Groups of Community (Traditional Malay House Compounds) |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Orang Bukit**                                  | **Orang Sawah**                                  | **Orang Laut**                                   |
| the typologies, pattern, and character of landscape elements in the *Orang Bukit* house compound is quite well planned, more open, and orderly manner related to its used and functions especially as a separator and boundary demarcation. the typical distribution of planting design for each compound also easily defined. For the purpose of aesthetic values at the front compound, herb and food plants monopolize the entire house | the typologies, pattern, and character of landscape elements in the *Orang Sawah* house compound is not balance between each other and mostly with the irregular distribution. more focused on the one side of the house compound to reveal existing views of paddy fields. the typical distribution of planting design for each compound also easily defined. | the typologies, pattern, and character of landscape elements in the *Orang Laut* house compound is not too dense and mostly with the irregular distribution. limited plant species due to the soil fertility (sandy soil) is not encouraging the growth process. the typical distribution of planting design for each compound also easily defined. embodiment of the feeling for cosmic pattern and the symbolism |

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The above site criteria table illustrates the summary of characterization of the landscape typologies, pattern and characters in a Malay house compound by the groups of community influence from their geographical setting and cultural tradition of their daily routine. It clearly represents that the different intentions of each group of community in developing their house compound enhances the needs and importance within internal and external spatial living contact suitable with their geographical setting.

Figure 3 Tradition as well as Geographical Setting Affects the Landscape Typologies, Attributes and Characteristics of the House Compound Along Peninsular Malaysia

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