The Essence of Malay Vernacular Houses:
Towards Understanding the Socio-cultural and Environmental Values

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Abstract

The Malay vernacular houses are inextricably intertwined with vernacular values embracing a natural harmony between architecture, people and environment. These vernacular values are comprised of socio-cultural and environmental concerns. The socio-cultural values are the spatial characteristics embodied in the functional spaces of Malay houses representing the cultural backgrounds, social requirements and actual needs of Malays. The environmental values are the spatial characteristics and locally environmental trends embodied in the functional spaces of Malay houses representing local characteristics of environment and tropic. Referring to the theoretical analysis, it is deduced that the aforementioned environmental and socio-cultural values are highly influential towards enhancing the quality of living environments inside the house leading to the enhancement of the quality of life as an expression of the degree of well-being. This study draws attention to the elaborations on the selected case models of Malay houses to scrutinize the significant vernacular values embodied in Malay houses irrespective of their type and region.

Keywords: Malay vernacular house, Socio-cultural values, Environmental values, Functional space.

Introduction

The Malay Kampong house represents a handmade house which is designed and constructed entirely by local Malays. A Malay house satisfies the Malay inhabitants through addressing their actual needs while responding to the local environments (Hashim, 2011). The Malay house is designed and built according to the Malay’s desires by understanding their daily needs, beliefs, culture and way of life. Meanwhile, the Malay house is considered as the Malay vernacular architecture which is highly in accordance with Nature and environment. The Malay house is comprised of functional spaces reflecting Malay way of life, desires and requirements (Yuan, 1991; Lundberg, 2008). Referring to Hashim, et al., (2009), and is developed to address the daily actual needs of users and therefore, there is sufficient congruence between the house
design and the cultural values. Moreover, the Malay house, being designed with a view to the local regional characteristics, is the embodiment of a natural design representing the congruence between the house design and environmental values. Nevertheless, comparing the Malay houses to the contemporary houses of Malaysia, Hashim et al., (2009) highlights that current inhabitants regardless of their expectations, actual needs and cultural values, must adapt their life to the given environment provided by contemporary housing. This is due to the fact that with the rapid modernization of Malaysia, the kampong house as part of Malay vernacular architecture has been replaced by contemporary houses (Yuan, 1991). This has led to new buildings which are not based on the tradition of their own regional context (Nilhan, et al., 2007; Hashim, et al., 2009).

Accordingly, various aspects of Malay house as a major vernacular value, has been lost inside the functional spaces of contemporary houses in Malaysia (Yuan, 2001; Zohri, 2011). As a result, the quality of contemporary houses has been mostly based on style and modernization rather than the tradition of particular regional context and therefore, there is not a high level of congruence between the house design, cultural values and local environmental characteristics (Yuan, 1991; Hashim, et al., 2009; GhaffarianHoseini, et al., 2010). Overall, Hashim (2011) claims that the Malay house could not be dissociated from the Malay’s way of life and local environment (Fig. 1 and 2).
Overall, with view to the current condition of contemporary houses in Malaysia, the congruity between the residential environment, the environmental values of region and cultural expectations of users is fundamentally vital to be considered in the design of contemporary houses (Moser, 2009; Husin, 2012). In essence, nowadays the modern houses with the stylish features are increased in new towns without any concern to the idea of vernacular houses. However many Malay inhabitants still prefer to live in houses which are based on their own tradition of regional context (Yuan, 2001; Hashim, 2009; Utaberta, 2010). This is because the quality of housing as one of the influential factors in enhancing the quality of life of the users is not based on their cultural values since a house is not only a physical space but an environment where social interactions take place (Ozaki, 2002; Glenn, 2004; Hashim, et al., 2009). Unlike the contemporary houses, the essence of Malay house is based on understanding the Malay actual needs, cultural expectations and way of life to be considered in the functional spaces of house. This is due to the fact as stated by Yuan (1991) that, “The traditional Malay house was not ‘created’ by anyone but has evolved through many generations of Malay society.” Nowadays, the Malay house with its valuable cultural and environmental values could still be observed in different regions of Malaysia.

**Contextual Background of Malay Vernacular Houses**

Geographically, Malaysia is located in the South-east of Asia with hot and humid bioclimatic conditions and heavy tropical rains. The normal temperature in Malaysia ranges between 70 to 90 Fahrenheit degrees throughout the year while the average rainfall is between 250 to 300 (Dahlan, et al., 2008; Yuan, 2001; Malaysian meteorological department, 2012). Accordingly, the Malay kampong houses are efficiently designed and built in order to respond to the environmental and climatic conditions of the region. Indeed, the natural harmony between the design of Malay houses and local characteristics of the region is one of the distinct features of these houses while this natural harmony is substantially intertwined with the following issues (Wan Ismail, 2005; Azzam, et al., 2011).
- Natural ventilation in order to decrease the humidity and enable the air movement inside the interior functional spaces.
- Use of local materials and natural resources with low thermal capacity.
- Prevention of the entrance of direct solar radiation into the interior functional spaces.

The artifice of Malay vernacular houses is involved with the religious beliefs that were based on Malay Islamic culture. The term ‘kampong’ refers to the Malay vernacular architecture which has been found in Malaysia in the past. The kampong as a Malay vernacular house was located in all the villages in rural areas of Malaysia. The term ‘kampong’ has two meanings in the Malay tradition. The first meaning refers to a complex of two houses or more in one area, while the second meaning indicates the connection between the local residents and their mosque in their own region (Dobby, 1886; Yuan, 2001).

**Design Concept of the Malay House**

As stated by Dobby (1886) and Wan Ismail (2005), the design concept of the Malay house is based upon a deep understanding of Malay life. Thus, the house is designed according to the social and cultural interactions of the Malay communities. Likewise, Thompson (2004) theorizes that the most appropriate place for studying and understanding the Malay culture is the kampong houses. A Malay kampong house is the place where the Malay culture and tradition are represented through local daily life (Thompson, 2004).

Besides, Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, et al., (2005) declares that these socio-cultural interactions shape the functional spaces and the interior atmosphere of the house. Subsequently, Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, et al., (2005) points to the elements which mostly affect the functional spaces of the Malay house; the Islamic beliefs, social relations and desired way of life are the main constituents shaping the spaces of the house. Accordingly, the users feel a sense of belonging to the house (Yuan, 1991; Hashim, et al., 2009). With reference to the Malay houses of Melaka, it is repeatedly cited that these houses are one of the most evolved, detailed, and comprehensive samples of Malay houses. These theories support the view that a deep understanding of the functional spaces of Malay houses can lead to the identification of the desired way of life the Malays and their socio-cultural attributes. From another perspective, Azzam, et al., (2011) reflects that the prominent environmental value of Malay houses is due to the natural responses to the climate and regional contexts. Hence, studying the design and layout of the Malay houses can also lead to the identification of local environmental values embodied in these houses.

Different types of Malay houses are similar in terms of the essence of Malay vernacular design while being different on particular aspects specifically the roof shapes. Due to this fact, they are generally distinguished based upon their roof shapes (Yuan, 1991; Wan Isamail, 2005; Hassan, 2010). However, the environmental values, their actual needs and their socio-cultural interactions which shape the house are similar in all the different regions (Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, et al., 2005). This is the main focus of this study.
Referring to the layout design of Malay houses, comparing the layout design of a basic Malay house with a different sample of a different region, it is deduced that the basis of design, and the essence of spatial layout originated from environmental concerns and socio-cultural impacts which are identical (Fig. 3). Abidin (1981) suggests that the design basis of Malay houses in different regions are similar based on the segregation of public and private spaces (Main house versus kitchen area).

![Figure 3: Comparison on the Basis of Malay house Design Layout](source: Abidin, 1981)

Originally, the Malay house is considered a cultural metaphor representing the Malay lifestyle (Dobby, 1886). This is the place where Malays feel relaxed, comfortable and satisfied as the conception of the house reflects their desired way of life. Responsively, Nasir, et al., (1996), in a study of Malay kampong houses elaborate on the essence of Malay house expressing their significant daily needs. Malay life is comprised of their culture, beliefs, social relations and desired way of life which is artistically integrated into the functional spaces of the Malay house.

**Socio-Cultural and Environmental Values of Malay Houses**

Literature points to the theory that the quality of housing is considered as a substantial factor for enhancing the quality of life. In this regards, this study theorizes that the vernacular architectural features of the functional spaces within Malay vernacular houses encompassing
the socio-cultural and environmental values could be considered as influential factors in enhancing the quality of life of Malay residents in contemporary houses of Malaysia.

According to Said, et al., (2008), the Malay vernacular house encompasses three main constituents which are physical, spatial and functional. He denotes that the spatial components of a Malay house are considered as the spaces within the kampong house which can be identified through various features. These features are based on the characteristics of spaces including their inter-relativity, adjacency, relation priority and the spatial arrangements of spaces. The functional components of a Malay vernacular house contains all the interactions of the users and their actual needs in the form of functions while living inside the house. The physical constituents of Malay houses embrace the main characteristics of the houses including the forms, materials, elements, etc. Focusing on the incorporation of the entire constituents, this study looks into the physical, spatial and functional constituents of Malay houses to identify the significant socio-cultural and environmental values.

**Design and Layout**

In this section, the study turns attention to the design and layout of the functional spaces reflecting the physical, spatial and functional constituents of Malay houses. Fundamentally, the plan of Malay vernacular house is designed based on a deep understanding of the functions that will be performed inside the interior spaces (Dobby, 1886; Yuan, 1991). The inter-relativity of spaces and the space adjacencies inside a Malay house are based on a clear perception of how, what and when these activities will be carried out. The space arrangements inside a Malay house are based on the priorities of functional spaces and the space adjacencies. Accordingly, the spaces inside a kampong house are divided into three main areas which are *Serambi, Rumah Ibu, and Rumah Dapur* (Abidin, 1981; Yuan, 1991; Hassan, 2010).

The spaces inside the Malay house are categorized into public, private and semi private spaces based on the level of privacy. Originally, a Malay house is comprised of front and backspaces as two major sections of its design layout which embrace the *Rumah Ibu* and *Rumah Dapur* (Yuan, 1991). The *Rumah Ibu* is the main part of the house covering various household’s interactions. On the other hand, the *Rumah Dapur* is the kitchen area of the house which is a private section for females. Inside the Malay house, all the spaces have specific sizes based on their own allocated functions. Responsively, the Malay house with an open plan layout facilitates the users to have an optimal use of space according to their definite functions (Dobby, 1886; Abidin, 1981; Yuan, 2001). Moreover, the Malay house responds to the environmental characteristics of the region through various factors such as open planning, large openings and limited walls and partitions. Large windows and openings are considered as another significant characteristic of Malay houses to let the fresh air and daylight to come inside the house. The size of a typical window is basically the same as the full height of the door. Another approach towards climatic control is based on the open plan layout of the Malay houses. This approach is highly influential in the cross ventilation of the house while giving a sense of openness to the interior atmosphere. Malay society has emphasized on community intimacy, as well as personal and family privacy (Yuan, 1991; Hashim, 2010). The priority given to privacy is reflected in the flexible and open planning of the Malay house.
However, the distinctive zoning of spaces provides the level of privacy required: a guest zone (public domain) with a clear male domain at the front, and the family zone (private domain), which is the female domain. As the Malay houses are built on stilts, the main entrance of the house is reachable through stairs leading to a covered porch called Anjung. Anjung acts as an open space which is allocated to the households to rest in that functional space while the unfamiliar guests are entertained there as presented in Figure 4 and 5 (Yuan, 1991; Wan Ismail, 2005; Hashim, 2010).

![Figure 4: Basic Malay House – Exterior and Interior Views](image1)

**Figure 4: Basic Malay House – Exterior and Interior Views**
Source: Author

![Figure 5: Case Models of Malay House in Melaka, Malaysia.](image2)

**Figure 5: Case Models of Malay House in Melaka, Malaysia.**
Source: Author

Basically, the porch acts as an open space entrance which is prior to the main entrance of the house. The first functional space of the house which is adjacent to the entrance area is Serambi Gantung. The Serambi Gantung is an extended linear functional space which is mostly allocated to the guests to be entertained. Accordingly, the Serambi Gantung contains low openings leading to cross ventilation while providing a nice view for the users. Moreover, the Serambi Gantung is adjacent to the main living room of the house which is called Rumah Ibu as the core of the house. The floor level of the Serambi Gantung is lower than Rumah Ibu indicating the border between functional spaces (Yuan, 1991; Hassan, 2010).
As stated by Wan Ismail (2005), the Rumah Ibu is the main functional space of the house which is a multi functional space. Accordingly, various needs of the users are addressed in this area as its open space provides the flexibility for different functions. Thus, the functions such as family gathering, sleeping, praying and many other functions can take place in this functional space. Furthermore, the Rumah Ibu contains larger openings in front and back which increase the air movements in the spaces of the house. Additionally, the floor level of Rumah Ibu is the highest among all functional spaces of the house representing its crucial impact on the house layout (Yuan, 2001). Rumah Tengah is also considered as a middle space which can be observed in large houses. This space is considered as a connection space between the main part of the house and kitchen area (Wan Ismail, 2005).

The Rumah Ibu as the main functional space in a Malay house is adjacent to the Serambi Gantung from one side and the other side is next to the Serambi Samanaik. The Serambi Samanaik is a similar functional space to the Serambi Gantung which was mentioned before (Yuan, 1991). The Serambi Samanaik and Serambi Gantung are utilized as circulation spaces as an approach towards enhancement of the cross ventilation while leading to a space called Selang. Accordingly, Selang is considered as a walkway or a passageway which is connected to the kitchen area. Selang also acts as a circulation space while being an allocated space for the female’s interactions. Selang is a space for women to chat, socialize and entertain with other females (Wan Ismail, 2005). Moreover, this space is perceived as a linkage between the main living room and the kitchen area which connects the back and front sections to each other. In addition, Selang provides an open space between the two major parts of the housed which is highly influential for the thermal comfort of the users and reinforcement of lighting (Yuan, 1991; Wan Ismail, 2005).

The Rumah Dapur is located next to the Selang as the back section of the house. This functional space is considered as the kitchen area of the house which is allocated to the females of the family. The Rumah Dapur is utilized for various interactions such as cooking, washing and food preparations while being on the lowest floor level (Abidin, 1981; Yuan, 1991). Consequently, the elaborated functional spaces are the basis of the design layout of a Malay house encompassing the spatial, physical and functional constituents (Fig. 6).
Eventually, it is theorized that a Malay house is comprised of some or all of the following functional spaces according to the spatial layout design. Moreover, according to the literature review, the size and proportions of the Malay house functional spaces are identified and compared representing the importance and significance of spaces as represented in the following list and Fig. 7 (Abidin, 1981).

- Front Entrance, E1
- Rear Entrance, E2
- Anjung, A
- Serambi, S
- Rumah Ibu (Main House), M
- Passage, P
- Rumah Dapur (Kitchen), K
- Rumah Tengah (Kitchen), K
- Deck, D
- Room, R
- Outdoor Space, O

Likewise, with view to the functional space locations, zonings and spatial adjacencies, according to Figure 8, it is identified that front zone, main house zone and kitchen zone are the three fundamentals of a basic Malay house while other types of Malay houses through the evolution of time still follow these fundamentals.
According to the elaborated facts, the basis of the plan layout of Malay house is presented which is fundamentally followed in different types of Malay houses in different regions, particularly Melaka. In view of that, the main Malay house plan forms are represented to confirm the discussed basis and fundamentals (See Fig. 9 and 10). It is believed that the adaptation of Malay house rules into the design of contemporary houses of Malaysia with focus on appropriate evolutionary changes in contemporary Malaysian lifestyle, particularly the city of Melaka as the embodiment of significant Malay vernacular houses, could lead to the creation of better living environments as an approach towards enhancement of the quality of life for Malay residents.

Figure 8: Fundamentals of Malay House Layout Design, Source: Abidin, 1981

Figure 9: Connector Zones in Malay House. Source: Abidin, 1981
Referring to the study by Zohri (2011), the concept of gender separation and privacy is highly appreciated within the design layout of the functional spaces of Malay houses. Similar to Abidin (1981), the study by Zohri (2011) confirms that the basis of Malay houses in different regions are identical and with view to the spatial organizations, there are slight changes in the design layout of different regions, however, the fundamentals including the front and back zones and the respective basis of space arrangements, hierarchies and adjacencies are accurately followed as discussed earlier. According to these studies, in regards to the design of Malay houses in Melaka, it is stated that the main difference in its design layout and spatial organization is that the passageway, Selang, in this type of Malay houses are larger compared to others. Furthermore, the Malay house staircases in Melaka are colorfully tiled and decorated. Nevertheless, the other features including the socio-cultural and environmental values embodied in the spatial organization of plan layout are similarly observed in Malay houses of Melaka (See Figure 11 and 12).

Figure 10: Plan Layout Types of Malay Houses versus Connector Zones, Source: Abidin, 1981

Figure 11: Melaka Malay House, Source: Zohri, 2011
Spatial Embellishments

One of the vernacular spatial features of the Malay houses is the spatial embellishment that can always be observed inside the functional spaces of house. The spatial embellishments are mostly based upon the Malay’s wood carving art. The Malay’s woodcarving art is substantially incorporated with Malay’s life, customs, beliefs, and Islam. Meanwhile, the regional characteristics of Malaysia provide various types of wooden materials for woodcarving art. The woodcarvings which are made from high quality wooden materials may last for many years. Woodcarving as a vernacular spatial feature can be seen in the interior functional spaces of the house on walls, partitions and openings as shown in Figure 13 and 14. This art which is mostly known as tebuk terus is utilized as spatial embellishment while being influential towards the cross ventilation of the house (Yatim, 1995). Most of the embellishments are based upon carvings, carried out by Malay craftsmen. As discussed, these carvings as decorated elements are utilized in walls, panels, and grills (Wan Ismail, 2005). Meanwhile, air-vents which are carved and decorated are utilized at the top of the walls and openings (Yuan, 1991). The designs of the carvings as the spatial embellishments are mostly based on geometrical, natural and Islamic patterns. These spatial embellishments as a vernacular spatial feature create visual interest and reduce the glares while being influential in reinforcing the natural ventilation of the house (Wan Ismail, 2005).

Figure 12: Malay Females Gathered at Selang’s Entrance,
Source: Yuan, 1991

Figure 13: Ventilation Panels on Windows and Walls.
Source: Hashim, et al., 2006
Literature develops the theory that the spatial characteristics of house units are considered as important factors in enhancing the quality of life. Accordingly, in this study we are only focusing on the spatial characteristics of the functional spaces with view to the environmental and socio-cultural values for enhancement of the quality of housing among many other factors that could be influential in enhancing the quality of life. The socio-cultural values of functional spaces is the value that represents the resident’s local way of life in a functional space while the environmental values represent the responds to the local climate. According to Dobby (1886) and Hashim (2010), the most appropriate place for studying and understanding the Malay culture is the kampong houses. A Malay kampong house is the place where the Malay culture and tradition are represented through local daily life (Thompson, 2004).

Culture of a region encompasses the life style of people including their thoughts, beliefs and functional behaviors while it is repeatedly cited to consider the cultural values in current housing developments as influential parameter for the quality of life (Touman, 2005). Accordingly, Low (1988) studies the cultural aspects of design and reviews various researches regarding the cultural meaning in residential designs. Due to this theory, cultural aspects of design, as a field of study, focuses on the user’s interactions, relationships, behaviors and correspondence between cultural orders and principles of design. This correspondence of interactions, relationships and behaviors is usually studied in terms of the spatial features and the spatial organizations of the functional spaces. Moreover, functional space is given meaning through the basis of that order which is ‘culture’ (Fernandez, 1986). Indeed, the cultural values of functional spaces express the meanings that indicate the resident’s local way of life in a functional space (GhaffarianHoseini, 2009).

The culture of a region is an amalgamation of the lifestyle, belief system and behavior of that region’s people – the strength of which directly influences their quality of life. In this study, culture is considered as a way of life which comprises the way they act, function, conduct social interactions and relationships based on their beliefs. According to archival texts, it is inferred that different cultures will have different use of space (Ahmad, et al., 2007). In this study, the
focus is on the use of space to understand the cultural values of living spaces. These living spaces inside the house play an influential role for representing the local cultures.

As elaborated, the layout of a Malay house is divided into two main parts representing the main house and the kitchen area. The Main house is the major part of the house which consists of Rumah Ibu, verandah, Serambi and other public spaces (Yuan, 2001). The design of Malay houses is based on an open plan layout as the family intimacy is one of the design concepts representing the cultural values. Beside the family intimacy, the privacy which has an important role on the design of Malay houses is the main reason of dividing the house into two parts (Hashim, 2010). The main house is the allocated place for the prayer as Muslims must offer prayer five times a day. The main part of the house is utilized for meetings, discussions, receiving guests and many other public interactions. According to the open plan layout of the house with flexible functional spaces, the congregations and specific feasts during a year are held in the main living room. Indeed, this flexibility which results in optimal use of space expresses the Malay’s simple way of living with no regards to ostentatious life style (Gibbs, 1987). The verandah which is close to the living room is considered as an open space for entertaining the gusts or family members while the child (boy) sleeping can take place there (Ahmad, et al., 2007). Moreover, a Malay house is based on lack of regard for pretentious lifestyle which leads to spaces which are even without modern furniture. Thus, a living area without modern bulky furniture can be utilized for sitting, entertaining friends, prayer and more functions while in night it is the allocated space for sleeping (Gibbs, 1987). According to Yuan (1991), in a Malay family, as the children grow older, the boys have more freedom to go out, visit friends or work for earning money. On the other hand, the girls are much more confined in the house to help their mothers while they spent most of a day in the Rumah Dapur area.

As stated by Ahmad, et al., (2007), the Malays like to keep the floor of the functional spaces clean so that they can sit on the floor or pray in any allocated space. Thus, the Malays must take off their shoes prior to entering the house. The main part of the house which contains the main living room is mainly allocated for men while the prayer can also be carried out there. However, the kitchen area is an allocated space for women. The activities such as preparing food, cooking, washing and family dining is carried out inside the kitchen area (Rumah Dapur) while the guest are served in the main living room. The Rumah Dapur is an allocated space for females and even the house owner can not enter the kitchen area while the female guests are inside. When a couple (husband and wife) come for a visit, the husband will enter the house from the main entrance at the landing and will be entertained at the verandah by the husband or the eldest son of the house owner. However, the wife will enter the house through the kitchen and will be entertained by the wife of the house owner or the eldest daughter in the family (Ahmad, et al., 2007).

The two main part of the house which are the main living room area and kitchen area are connected through a joint functional space which is a passage way. This space is allocated for the ladies interactions, chit-chatting, kids playing area and even casual discussions between the house owner and his wife (Yuan, 2001). The Malay houses in different regions of Malaysia have
minor differences in design. However, the functions and functional spaces of every section remain the same (Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, et al., 2005). When a guest intends to enter a Malay house, the status and relation of the person to that particular family should be considered. If the person is a stranger, he can only stay at the landing area while if the person is a friend of the family members, he can enter the house up to the verandah. However, if the person is a relative of the family, he can enter the main living room to be entertained there. The kitchen area is always a restricted functional space which is allocated for the females and a male guest can not enter that area unless he is a family member or son-in-law (Ahmad, et al., 2007). These facts represent the fundamental role of privacy as a significant socio-cultural values embodied in the functional spaces of Malay houses.

As elaborated, with view to the functionalities embodied in the functional spaces of Malay houses, the main functional elements derived from user’s demands while residing inside the house are divided into entry and circulation, cleaning, cooking, eating, entertainment, sleeping, storage, and work (Abidin, 1981; Hashim, et al., 2009). Accordingly, the following figures represent the appropriate functional space accommodating particular functional elements, therefore, the study highlights that each space inside Malay houses is efficiently designed to be allocated to certain activities based on true understanding of the cultural backgrounds, demands and expectations of Malay inhabitants (See Figure 15).

With view to the congruence between the cultural values of the Malay inhabitants and the design of functional spaces within Malay houses, according to scholarly researches focusing on the spatial layout design of Malay houses and the relations to the functional behavior relationships, it is identified that the relationships towards functional behaviors is highly interrelated to gender, age, and the status of user as guest, family, stranger, etc (Abidin, 1981; Hashim, et al., 2009). Therefore, it is clearly deduced that there is a high level of relationship between the functions allocated to the spaces and the social-cultural considerations.

In conclusion, it is demonstrated that people with different cultures and regions have different way of life specifically while living in their houses. The same goes to Malays while the design of Malay kampong houses represents specific way of living which is allocated for them.
according to their cultural backgrounds, demands and desires. Since most of their communication and social interactions occur in their living place, the Malays have their own way of setting up rules and norms patented by vernacular architectural features of the functional spaces within Malay houses. Understanding these vernacular features encompassing the socio-cultural and environmental values, leads to appreciating the Malay’s life style and local way of life as well as the efficient local design towards natural responds to the climate and region (Ahmad, et al., 2007; Moser, 2009).

Discussion

As repeatedly discussed and highlighted by various studies, it is denoted that the functional spaces of the Malay house are intertwined with cultural values and life style of Malays. Accordingly, the design of spatial planning in a Malay house leads to flexible open spaces which are appropriate for the Malay life styles. Indeed, this flexibility which results in optimal use of space expresses the Malay’s simple way of living with no regards to ostentatious life style.

Moreover, the other reasons which lead to these open spaces are the concept of family intimacy & community intimacy, the preference for a simple living, performing seasonal feastings, responding to climatic factors and lack of regard to the pretentious living patterns and deep understanding of the Malay’s way of life (Wan Ismail, 2005; Yuan, 1991). For instance, the Rumah Ibu which is embraced with Serambi Samanaik and Serambi Gantung is an open space that can be extended by these two surrounding functional spaces during seasonal feastings. Moreover, this open plan layout reflects the environmental responds to the local climate leading to proper cross ventilation for enhancement of thermal comfort sensation of users (See Figure 16).

As discussed, each functional space within a Malay house fulfills various functions and needs of Malay occupants based on their desired way of life. Furthermore, with view to relations between functional and spatial elements, the concept of multi functional spaces reflects an open plan design with limited walls, partitions and furniture to provide the opportunity to expand the functional spaces (Yuan, 1991). For instance, the same functional space which is utilized for sleeping at night, could be allocated to sitting, praying or other activities during the day and with particular focus on the issue of flexibility, it can turn into a new space with slight changes. Therefore, the conception and use of space in Malay house represent an economical; flexible; vernacular house which carries the Malay life and cultural values (Yuan, 1991). In view of that, the significant socio-cultural values of functional spaces encompass the optimal use of space, privacy, compatibility with life style while the significant environmental values of functional spaces is defined by responding to local environment through the concept of natural ventilation based on the open plan layout, utilization of local materials, large openings and spatial embellishments (Gibbs, 1987). Due to these reasons, the Malays have a well-being feeling in their own vernacular houses as the house and its functional spaces are designed based on their own desires. However, this fact is not highly considered in the contemporary life as the contemporary houses designed by public or private sectors are
concerned about other priorities (Gibbs, 1987; Zohri, 2011; Husin, 2012). Eventually, the Malay vernacular houses are perceived as the most considerable example for extracting the Malay culture in the Malay society (Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, et al., 2005). The Malay house is an irreplaceable architectural heritage with obvious ties with the past history, Malay culture, way of life and local environment. However, this exquisite embodiment of socio-cultural and environmental values of local region is neither highly appreciated nor considered during the design of contemporary houses (Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, et al., 2005).

The Significance of Socio-Cultural and Environmental Values

According to Abidin (1981) who comprehensively studies various types of Malay houses, the form of Malay houses, particularly roof shapes and embellishments, may vary from a region to another; nonetheless, there are certain similarities in all types of Malay houses due to the culture of Malay inhabitants and the local natural forces. Therefore, this study elucidates and delineates the essence of Malay houses, as the similarities between all types, embracing the significant socio-cultural and environmental values. Referring to the Figure 17, it is apparent that despite the minor changes on forms and shapes, the essence of space arrangements and spatial configuration of the house as the concern of this research are significantly similar.

Figure 16: Open and Enclosed Serambi. Source: Zohri, 2011.
In this regard, literature review comprehensively highlights and reflects the essence and main characteristics of Malay houses. Reviewed case models on Malay kampong houses confirm the theoretical perspectives regarding the significant role of cultural and environmental values within the design of Malay houses towards the well-being of Malay inhabitants. This is the criterion which has not been fully considered during the design of contemporary houses in Malaysia and therefore, there is not a high level of congruency between the socio-cultural, environmental values and the functional spaces of contemporary houses. According to the theoretical investigations on Malay houses, it is inferred that the plan layout of a Malay house explicitly represents the impacts of Malay cultural backgrounds, actual needs and daily lifestyle as well as the consideration of environmentally regional characteristics (Hassan, 2010). According to the studies by Zanariah (2003) and Hashim (2009), concentrating on various types of Malay houses with view to the embedded vernacular values within the functional spaces of Malay houses, it is identified that the design of Malay house, unlike the design of contemporary houses of Malaysia as stated by Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi (2003), is inherently bound up with socio-cultural and environmental values of local region. In this regards, concentrating on another sample of Malay house layout design as represented in Figure 18, the investigations confirm the existence of environmental values through responding to the local climate and region as well as the socio-cultural values through responding to the user’s actual needs based on their cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, as elaborated by various scholarly studies, Zohri (2011) expresses that contemporary houses in Malaysia fail to respond to the local tradition including the cultural and environmental attributes of Malaysian context. Moreover, it is particularly expressed that the concept of family intimacy, privacy beside the local environmental performance and adaptability could not be seen in contemporary houses of Malaysia.

Figure 17: The Identical Fundamentals of Functional Spaces with Malay Houses,
Source: Abidin, 1981
In conclusion, despite the possible changes in the lifestyles of Malays according to the evolution of time and the impacts of technology adoptions, it is eventually theorized that the concept of privacy and optimal use of space including the issues of simplicity, multi-functionality, family intimacy, open plan layout and flexibility are the significant socio-cultural values embodied in Malay houses which have the potentials to be implemented in the current design of contemporary houses in Malaysia. With view to the environmental values, referring to the current attempts towards sustainability and energy saving in housing developments, the concept of natural ventilation embodied in the functional space of Malay houses through the utilization of appropriate local materials, openings, open plan layout and spatial embellishments; is the significant environmental value which has the potential to be implemented in the current design of contemporary houses in Malaysia. As a result, this study recommends further investigations on the essence of Malay houses to extract and analyze the vernacular values with potentials for being integrated into the design of contemporary housing developments in Malaysia.

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