

The meaning of home: Privacy, modesty and hospitality in traditional Malay house, West Borneo, Indonesia.

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Abstract

Home is more than the physical structure of a house, dwelling or a residence where a person, family or a household resides to achieve the basic human needs. For ethnic Malays, the meaning of a house was not only a place to live, or a place to do every activity in life. It also becomes a measure of one's responsibility towards his family. The Malay Muslim cultured communities forms a distinctive pattern in the residential and community systems. It is different from the traditional Malay house in Malaysia. According to Othman et al, traditional Malay homes predominantly tend to share a "humility in design", such that homes are built with economical and sustainable materials, which also provide thermal comfort.

The traditional Malay community house in West Borneo is in the form of a stilt house and was located on the edge of the river. It has a uniqueness in the socio-cultural pattern of the *ummah* concept or brotherhood in Muslims. Traditional Malay houses are of three types based on caste or level of society identified as either *Potong limas* house, *potong kawat* house and *potong godang* house. This study examines the Malay community house in West Borneo using an analysis of typologies. It intends to classify house forms based on the characteristics to understand the meaning of home in traditional Malay houses.

The results of the study found that of the three types creating a safe and comfortable environments used principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality in living in the community. The design of traditional Malay house is subject to guidelines and principles outlined in the Islamic Law.

Keywords: Privacy, Modesty, Hospitality, Traditional, Malay, House

Introduction

A house or a dwelling is one that provides shelter and protection for its owners or occupants from climate, weather and other aspects of the natural and built environment. Although the words 'home' and 'house' are commonly used as interchangeable terms, the meaning of home involves much more than the dwelling itself. A home is a reflection of its owners or dwellers and the traits of each person living within it. Considered an essential part of the lifestyle of people or their 'third skin', a home serves to fulfil various primary physical and emotional human needs (Belk and Sobh, 2009). Culture is regarded to be a key determinant of the nature of any given home. Altman and Chemers (1984) propose that a home is a reflection of various cultural influences, along with environmental and technological factors.

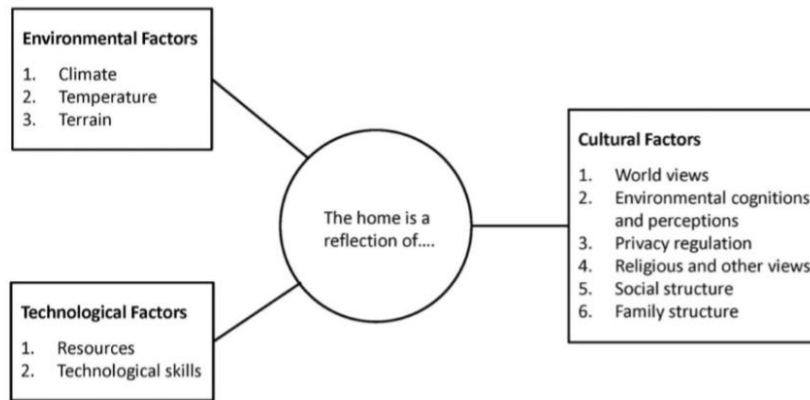


Fig. 1: The home in relation to other factors

Source: Altman & Chemers, 1984, p. 156

The archipelago traditional architecture has a variety of cultural identities and their respective characters. The definition of traditional architecture in question is architecture whose birth is motivated by the norms, customs and habits and circumstances of the local environment. Space as the core of architectural creativity is the most essential thing in human life. Even the birth of a space marks the birth of a life. Therefore, it is not surprising that understanding and meaning of space is often associated with values, spirits or soul as an important expression of a system of symbols and processes of life, which at the same time become a sign of the birth of a new identity or identity of a civilization. The existence and role of architecture as the creator of space, identity and value confirms that architecture, besides acting as a construction of identity markers is at the same time an expression of culture, economy, technology and a reflection of the value system of the social life of the community (Nuryanti, 2009).

Research Methodology

The study classifies the traditional Malay house on the basis of typology. They are divided into three types: *potonglimas* house inhabited by community leaders and the family of the palace, *potongkawat* house inhabited by traders and *potonggodang* house inhabited by the ordinary people.

The research is focused in the area around *Pontianak* City Kadriah Palace Pontianak City, West Borneo. It is precisely around the Pontianak Sultanate Kadriah palace area. The sample used is a traditional Malay residential house with 3 house samples taken in each type with the characteristics of the stilt house. Sampling is based on the category of West Kalimantan traditional houses, has the same type, element integrity and there are still residents. Here are 9 observations:

Research Location

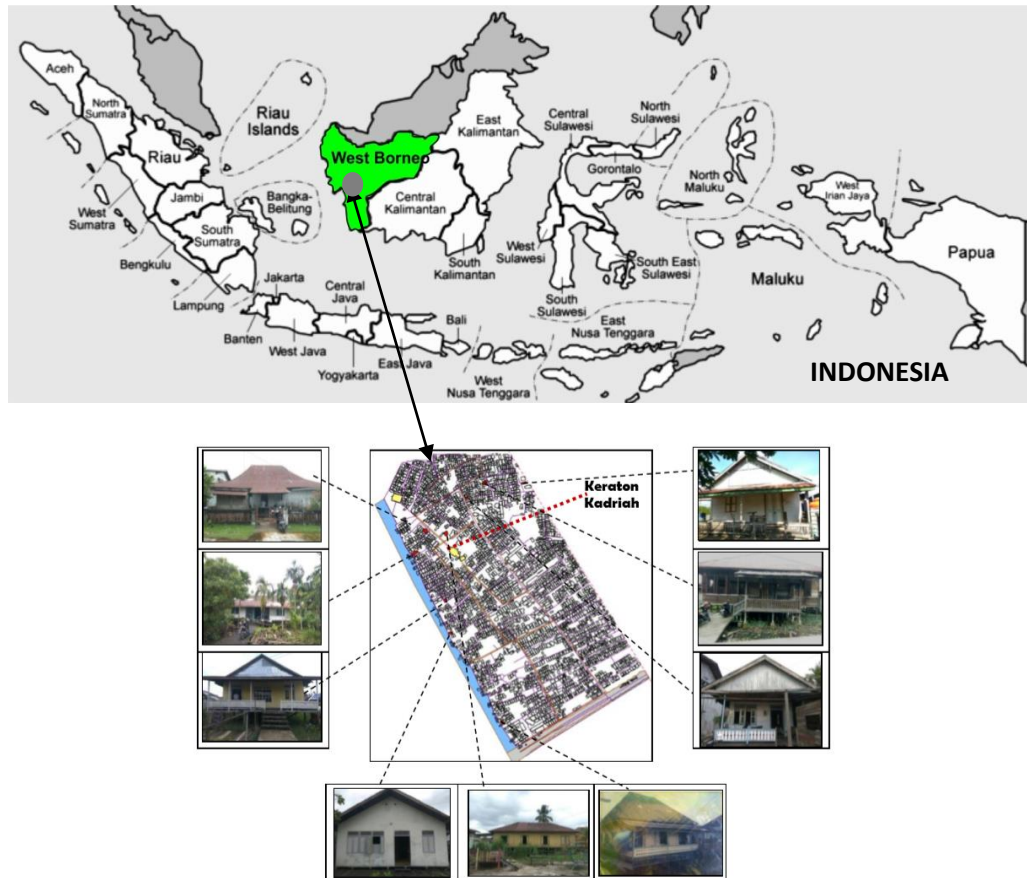





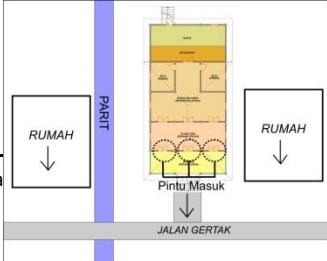


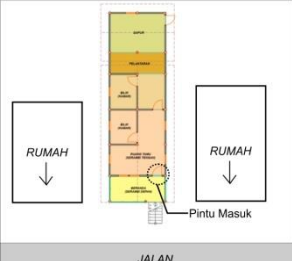


Fig. 2: Location Map
Source: Author's Documentation, 2018

PotongLimas House	PotongKawat House	PotongGodang House
  	  	  

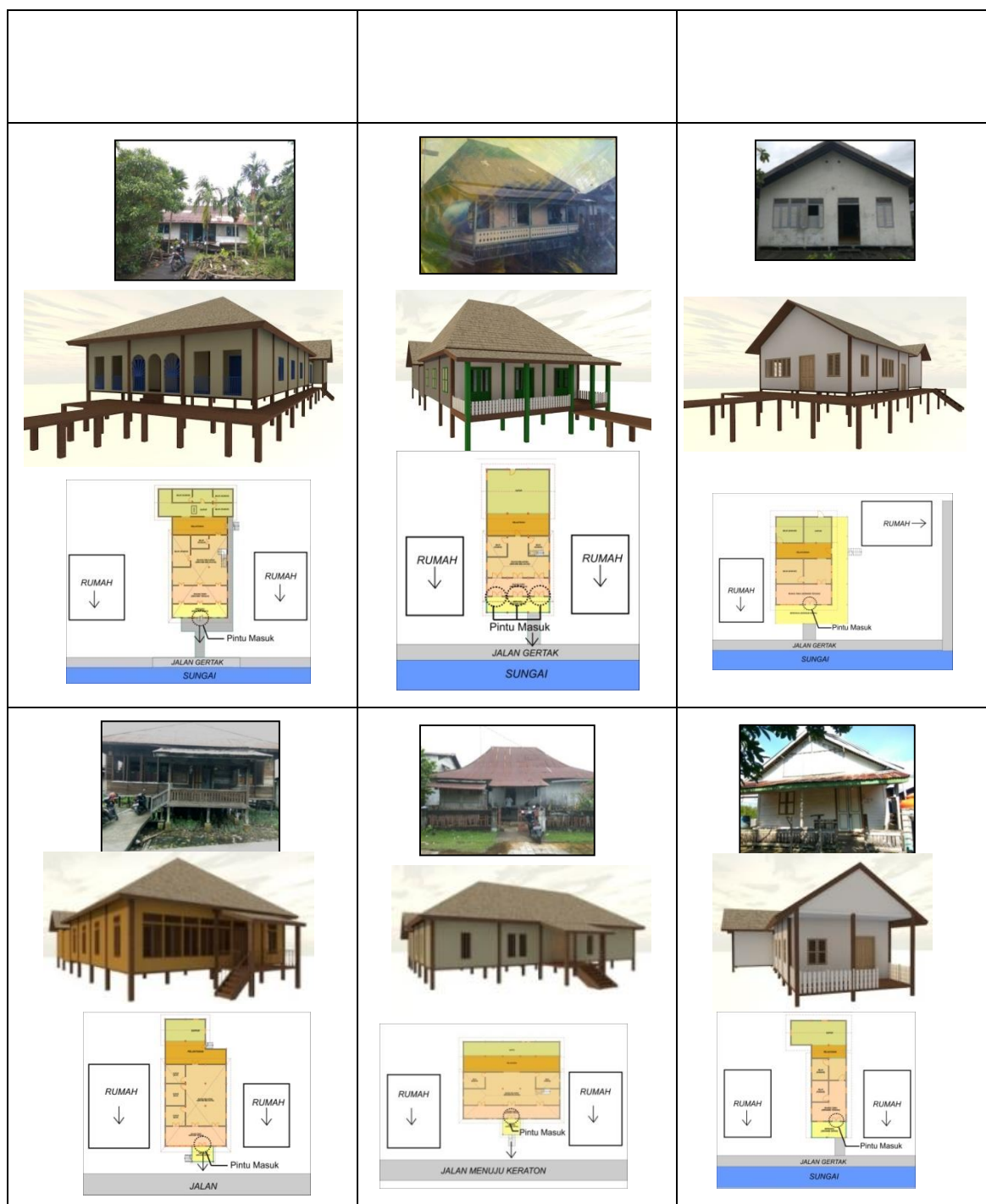


Fig. 3: Observation Sample
Source: Author, 2018

Finding and Discussion

A home or a rumah (in Malay) is an unparalleled base for human settlement (Heathcote, 2012; Rybczynski, 1987) that conveys “a complex multi-layered conditions but integrates”, (Shirazi, 2011) with symbolic expressions and messages (Malkawi, et al. 2003). An individual’s arrangements and sense of interior space within a home are affected by several factors such as religion and culture (Rapoport, 2005).

Religious and cultural values have a significant impact on the structures of families and their domestic behaviours as well as the use of their interior spaces. Traditional families

concentrate on adhering to Islamic religious teachings that vary considerably from those normally associated with the western society (Belk and Sobh, 2011). These teachings require that a home fulfils three essential needs: (a) privacy- a secure and private sanctuary for the family, (b) modesty- a space to perform religious and spiritual activities through frugality and design humility and (c) hospitality- a place to strengthen relationships with neighbours and society. (Othman, 2016).

Malay traditional houses were divided into 3 rooms. They were the main house (*rumahinduk*), and support house (*rumahanak*). These two parts are usually connected by a corridor (*pelantaran*). The rooms in the main house were front veranda (porch) or *serambi depan*, middle veranda (living room) or *serambitengah*, back veranda (family room) or *serambibelakang*, and bedroom. Then, the corridor and support house had the kitchen.

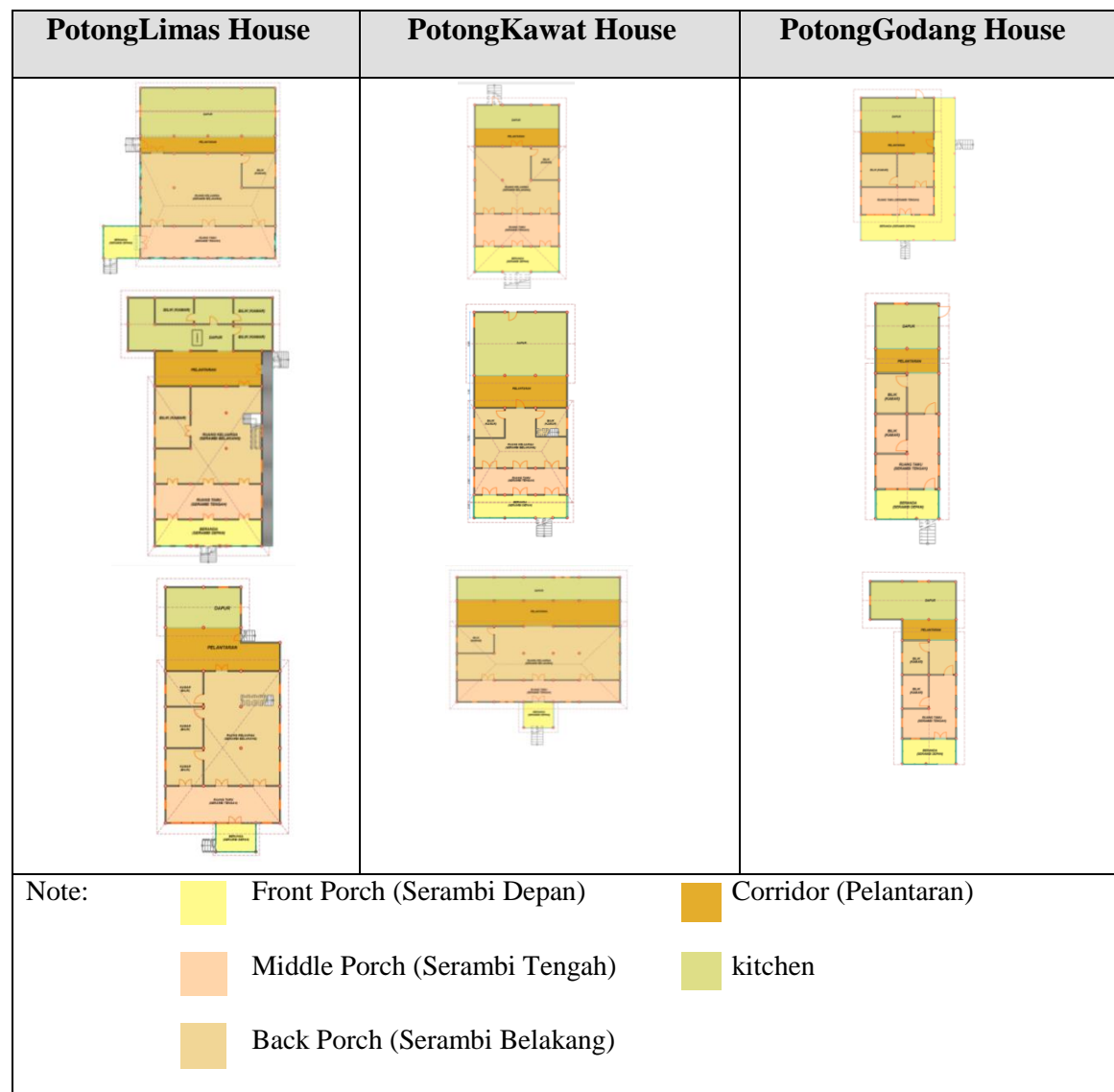


Fig. 4: Space Pattern in traditional Malay of West Kalimantan

Source: Author, 2018

Privacy

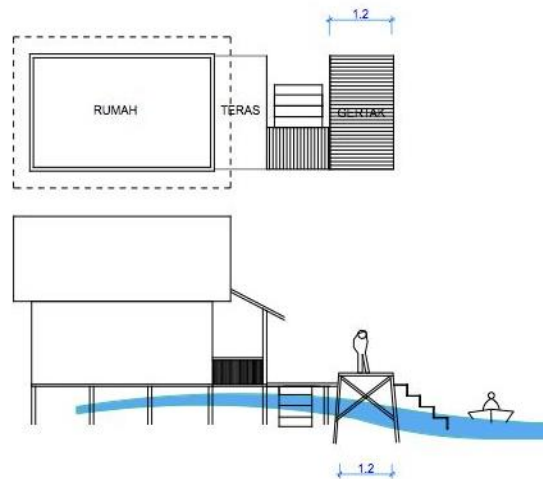
Privacy is conceived differently by every individual depending on one's perception of his/her personal space. Privacy is generally considered to be the essence of a home and personal/familial needs, which determines and controls accessibility between a person and others (Hashim & Rahim, 2008). Privacy needs, the use of space and how privacy was regulated is one

of the outstanding ways in which cultures differ, resulting in different house forms around the world (Rapoport, 1969). Malay in West Kalimantan is Muslim, thus the meaning of house was influenced by its culture and religion.

Privacy in the Malay society existed with different boundaries, coverage and realization. The provision of privacy in the traditional house was achieved through the indigenous ways, which responded to climate, geography and culture of the people. The positioning of the house was on stilts higher from the ground level around 1-1.8 meter so that other people who are outside the house cannot see directly into the house. This also protected the house from floods disaster. The Malay house used high windows with decorative panels, careful location of doors or internal openings opening indirectly to each other and arrangement of spaces according to public and private domains. Curtains, screens and partitions were used to provide visual privacy in the house.



Fig. 5: Visual privacy vertically and horizontally



Source: Author, 2018

Fig. 6: Around Traditional Malay Houses controlled from flood disaster

Source: Author, 2018

Modesty

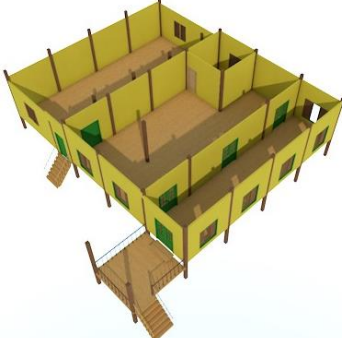



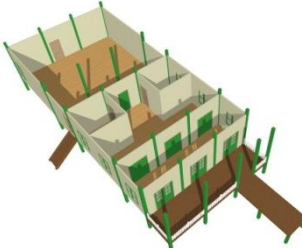

Modesty is a personality trait, wherein one remains polite and humble without necessarily lacking self-esteem or self-confidence (Azizah & Putri, 2013). The act of modesty can be classified into two main categories: (a) physical modesty in terms of dress code and design humility, and (b) inner modesty in terms of internal perception (self-improvement or self-motivation) and social interaction (shyness, humility, and politeness) (Azizah & Putri, 2013; 104).

Design humility in traditional Malay house could be described with the use of locally sourced materials rather than expensive imported materials, Simple furnishings are common in traditional Malay homes and reflect their lifestyle and economic situations and humble behaviour is based on the function of a home as a basis of society. Every individual has freedom to do activities inside the house but still maintains modesty and mutual respect between residents.

Hospitality

Hospitality can be defined as constitutional acceptance of or receptiveness to others. This trait has played an important role in the traditional Islamic society (Sobh, et al, 2013; Shraim, 2000). Hospitality is closely associated with the compassionate treatment of strangers and with the significance of sharing with others within the Islamic culture (Memarian et al., 2011; Sobh & Belk, 2011). Traditional Malay houses in Pontianak had the concept of "ummah" or brotherhood in Muslims as it was reflected by the tenants of *potonglimas* house. They were the hospitality in religious events in the house. Organizing events or meetings in families and neighbors was important in establishing friendship.

In *potonglimas* houses, it had the community leaders and relatives of the palace. This house had a unique social cultural pattern. It was large and had many dividers or partitions. The central porch (*serambitengah*) and back porch (*serambibelakang*) was large and was used for gathering and discussion. The central porch (*serambitengah*) became a communal space for men and the back porch space became a communal space for women. In the three types of traditional Malay houses in West Kalimantan, there is always a dividing barrier between spaces, both coverings in the form of doors and curtains. This condition exists because the occupants are maintaining the privacy between men and women in accordance with the teachings of Islam.

PotongLimas House	PotongKawat House	PotongGodang House
		
		

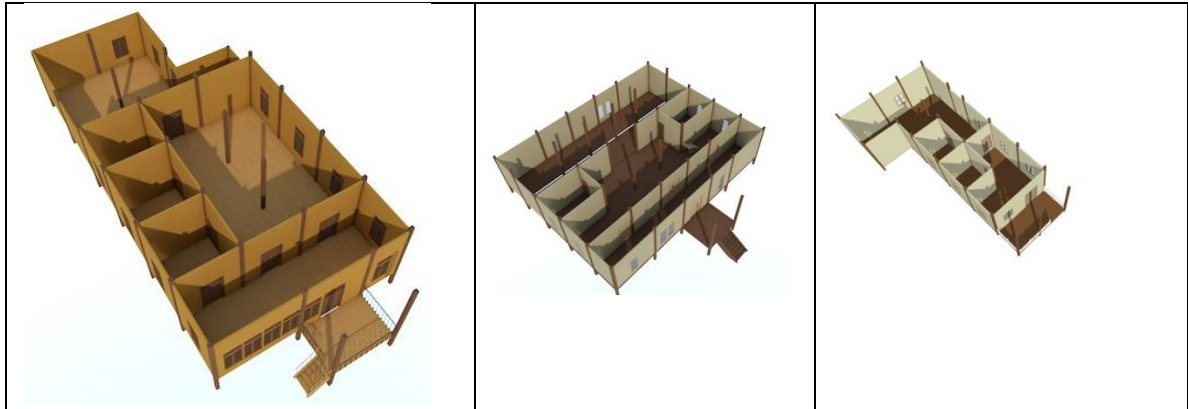
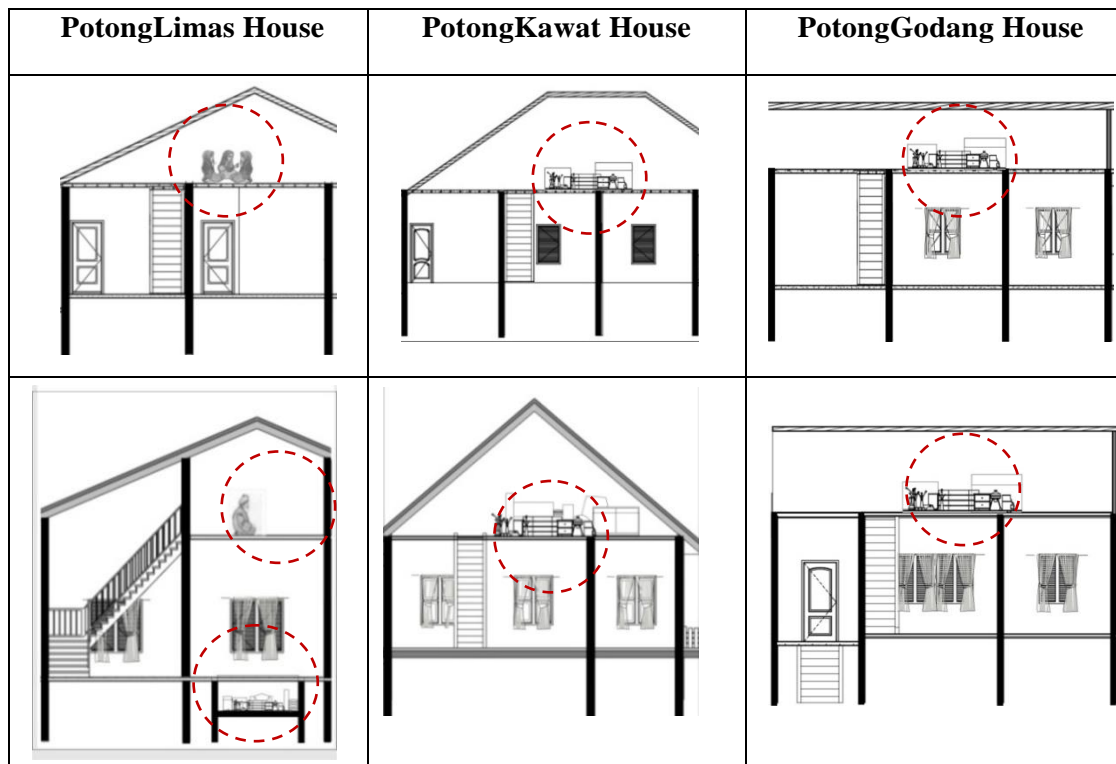
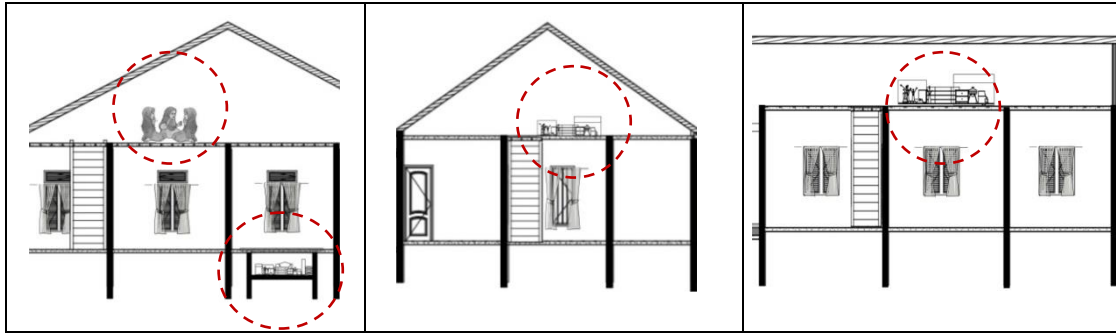


Fig. 7: Dividers or partition in Traditional Malay House

Source: Author, 2018

In house type *potonglimas* house, similarities were found in the three layers of walls as the divider for front, middle, and back veranda. They were three doors in the middle veranda. The function of the door was to make the access when they had the big events, such as Sultan's visit, the wedding party, or religious events that was held in the house. During the big events, those three doors were opened.



**Fig. 8: Function Rooms**

Source: Author, 2018

The *Potong limas* house was able to accommodate many people in the house when it was used for big events. It could be seen from the pavement walls or wood carving walls as decorations for a wedding or pavilion that were not found in other types of houses. In maximizing the use of space for events and celebrations, the owner of the house put the goods and home appliances in a storage under the house. It was under the back room or under the family room. The storage was built using the piles at the bottom of the house. Although often there were events in the house, the tenants still managed to maintain their visual privacy. In the upper section of the *potonglimas* house, there is a *parak-parak*; an open room without partitions encompassing the entire upper part of the main house.

In everyday life, in accordance with the teachings of Islam, women are placed in a position of respect, which protected them from being seen by strangers of opposite sex. Occasionally *parak-parak* became a prayer room. The *potongkawat* house was smaller, in contrast to *limas*, and this type was only used for housing that does not hold events in the house. Neither the *potonggodang* house is said to be the smallest in size compared to the two previous types. This type is called a people's house. Residents of *potongkawat* and the *potonggodang* house usually gathered in the type of *potonglimas* house, which is the place where cultural and religious events were held. The *potongkawat* house which was a smaller house, in contrast to *limas*, only used the house as housing that does not hold events in the house. Neither the *potonggodang* house is said to be the smallest in size compared to the two previous types. This type is called a people's house. Residents of *potongkawat* and the *potonggodang* house usually gathered in the type of *potonglimas* house, which is the place where cultural and religious events were held.

Analysis of Findings

The Findings from the three types of houses in the case study of traditional Malay houses in Pontianak City, West Borneo shows that the three principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality are interdependent and synergetic in creating a safe, comfortable and practical home for a Muslim family. The conceptual approach of a home in traditional Malay house were: a) private and safe place for an individual and family; b) a practical base for personal and families' religious activities using frugal design approaches and; c) base for extending hospitality and strengthen relationship with neighbours and society. Islamic law which is based on the Quran, sunnah and hadith is the guidance and role model of the Muslim community in Pontianak City in building a house. The creation of this space is influenced by the values held by the Malay people so that it becomes a sign of identity for traditional Malay houses in Pontianak City, West Borneo.

Conclusions

The meaning of home for the Malay people in west Borneo is not only as a physical form of housing that is related to local materials, economical and sustainable material which also provide thermal comfort. It is also a form of social community. This social community also keeps residents' privacy, modesty and preserves a sense of hospitality.

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