PLACEMENTS AND INFLUENCES ON WOODCARVINGS OF TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSES IN NEGERI SEMBILAN

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PLACEMENTS AND INFLUENCES ON WOODCARVINGS OF TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSES IN NEGERI SEMBILAN

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Architecture

Faculty of Built Environment Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Master's Thesis (By research)

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Architecture

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I declare that this thesis entitled "Placements and Influences on Woodcarvings of Traditional Malay Houses in Negeri Sembilan" is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

Signature :

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Date : 26th June 2014

To my beloved husband, daughter and family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In preparing this thesis, I was in contact with many people, researchers, academicians, and practitioners. They have contributed towards my understanding and thoughts. In particular, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my main thesis supervisor Y. M. Associate Professor Dr. Raja Nafida Raja Shahminan for her encouragement, guidance and critics in the preparation of my thesis. My appreciation also goes out to my co-supervisor Dr. Fawazul Khair Hj Ibrahim who has continuously provided me with supportive and encouraging comments for this research. Without their continuous support and interest, this thesis would not have been the same as presented here.

I am also indebted to Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) for generously funding my master study. Librarians at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), staff at the resource center of Faculty of Built Environment (FAB) and Center for the Study of the Built Environment in the Malay World (KALAM), UTM also deserve special thanks for their assistance in supplying the relevant literatures for this research.

My sincere appreciation also extends to all of my colleagues and others who have provided assistance at various occasions throughout this research. Their views and tips are useful in one way or another. Last but not least, I am grateful to all of my family members who have dedicated their time and patience throughout my study years and also to my husband who has been there for me from the start until the end of this thesis.

ABSTRACT

Woodcarving is a form of art depicting the carver's intentions and emotions which are laid out on a canvas of timber panels. Despite mass application of woodcarvings in Traditional Malay Houses around Malaysia, the knowledge behind the placements and influences of woodcarvings implemented in Negeri Sembilan needs further research in order to define, identify and differentiate local woodcarvings. This study aims at investigating the placements and influences on woodcarvings of Traditional Malay Houses in Negeri Sembilan through detailed analysis and synthesis of the woodcarvings used. Qualitative research methodologies were used; firstly based on 15 case studies of Traditional Malay Houses in Negeri Sembilan and secondly through content analysis of books, reports, journals and measured drawings. 15 research samples were obtained from measured drawings archived by the Centre for the Study of the Built Environment in the Malay World (KALAM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Analysis of the data gathered through the various means mentioned above suggested that the woodcarving designs and placements have similar cultural influences of Minangkabau, Chinese and Javanese with religious influences from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. These placements and influences were incorporated with local designs which made the juxtaposition of the woodcarvings found in Negeri Sembilan involving many cultural, religious and political influences. The findings indicated that woodcarvings of Traditional Malay Houses in Negeri Sembilan are infused with a variety of placements and influences which ultimately provided some insight into the multicultural and multi-faith community that live side by side in Negeri Sembilan. Even though they were from different backgrounds, the locals and outsiders lived peacefully together and their influences were depicted on the woodcarvings of the Traditional Malay Houses in Negeri Sembilan.

ABSTRAK

Ukiran kayu adalah satu bentuk seni visual yang mencerita dan menggambarkan niat serta emosi pengukir di atas panel-panel kayu. Walaubagaimanapun, penggunaan ukiran kayu yang banyak di rumah-rumah tradisional Melayu di seluruh Malaysia tidak menggambarkan pengetahuan yang mendalam disebalik pengaruh rekabentuk ukiran-ukiran kayu yang diguna pakai di Negeri Sembilan. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan menyelidiki kedudukan serta pengaruh reka bentuk ukiran-ukiran kayu rumah tradisional Melayu di Negeri Sembilan melalui kajian terperinci bagi mendefinisi dan mengasingkan rekaan ukiran kayu yang digunakan di Negeri Sembilan dan Negeri-negeri lain di Malaysia. Metodologi kajian kualitatif telah digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini iaitu kaedah pertama melalui kajian kes 15 buah rumah tradisional Melayu di Negeri Sembilan dan kedua melalui penelitian bahan-bahan bacaan seperti buku, lukisan, jurnal, laporan, laman sesawang serta laporan lukisan terukur. Analisis terhadap 15 sampel data yang telah diperolehi melalui koleksi laporan lukisan terukur di Pusat Kajian Alam Bina Dunia Melayu (KALAM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) rekabentuk ukiran kayu serta kedudukan ukiran telah menunjukkan bahawa dipengaruhi oleh pelbagai budaya seperti Minangkabau, Cina dan Jawa berserta pengaruh-pengaruh agama Hindu, Buddha dan Islam. Pengaruh-pengaruh ini disepadukan bersama reka bentuk ukiran-ukiran kayu tempatan dan diselitkan elemen-elemen dari pengaruh budaya, agama dan politik yang berbeza sehingga melibatkan pelbagai pengaruh reka bentuk ukiran. Kajian memperlihatkan bahawa ukiran-ukiran kayu rumah tradisional Melayu di Negeri Sembilan mempunyai pelbagai kedudukan serta pengaruh reka bentuk yang memberikan gambaran bahawa walaupun berbeza latar belakang, penduduk tempatan dan orang luar mampu menyesuaikan kehidupan yang aman dan pengaruh mereka boleh didapati digunakan pada ukiran-ukiran rumah tradisional Melayu di Negeri Sembilan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the Malay language, the word woodcarving which is translated into the Malay word *ukiran* literally means 'drawings/paintings which are chiselled / carved onto decorative objects. Woodcarvings are also an expression of oneself which is simple, direct and have been the same in many past civilizations (Sabol, 2008). This shows that woodcarvings are a form of decorative element which are done to beautify an object (Iman, 2006). Woodcarvings in traditional Malay houses are therefore used as a decorative element to decorate the exterior and interior elements of the timber houses. Woodcarving in the Malay world is known as a form of art and craft which is enjoyed and appreciated by the community (Abdul Halim, 1987). The action of carving into timber allows art to be injected into timber houses and expresses the intentions of the owners of the houses in doing so.

Woodcarvings are a form of art which transcends culture, belief and social customs of the Malays. Woodcarving is not just mere decorations as it is also a form of art which interprets the carver's intentions in the design and form of the woodcarving intended (Oughton, 1976). Thus the woodcarver employed could convey what he feels, his intentions and his hopes to achieve in his woodcarving. This is then projected onto the timber houses of the Malays which can then be appreciated by residents and guests. The design elements used by the carvers are concepts which are derived from his surroundings such as that of nature and the

environment, his religious beliefs and cultural influences. Therefore the act of carving can be seen as a manifestation of the carver's intentions which are influenced by his surroundings or came from inspirations through his experiences and beliefs (Ismail & Ahmad, 2001).

The application of woodcarvings in traditional Malay houses can be found across the country and majority of woodcarvings are found in traditional Malay houses of people with influences in their community; the leaders. Although some commoners' houses are found to be adorned with woodcarvings, they are not as numerous as those found in the leaders' houses. This is due to the cultural aspect of the Malay society which implies that people with status lives a wealthier and easier lives than those of the commoners thus the differences on their art and craft could also be seen (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2009). Woodcarvings became a symbol of status and influence among people who could afford it and outside influences on the designs of the woodcarvings showed the connections that the owner had with the outside world. Woodcarvings became not only a form of art and decoration but were also a status symbol of the owners of the houses.

1.1. Aim of Research

The aim of this research is to investigate influences on the designs of woodcarvings in the traditional Negeri Sembilan Malay houses.

1.2. Objectives of Research

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- i. To locate the placements of woodcarvings used in traditional Malay houses of Negeri Sembilan
- ii. To determine the typologies of woodcarvings found in traditional Malay houses of Negeri Sembilan
- iii. To investigate and document the different types of design influences on the woodcarvings of Malay traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions that were undertaken throughout the research are:

- i. What are the common placements of the woodcarvings found in the traditional Malay houses of Negeri Sembilan?
- ii. What are the typologies of woodcarvings found in traditional Malay houses of Negeri Sembilan?
- iii. What are the design influences that can be found on the woodcarvings of traditional Malay houses of Negeri Sembilan?

1.4. Research Gap

The research gap for this thesis is based on an assessment of current and past researches done on woodcarving. The researches studies are then analyzed and compiled into their respective field of focuses to find out what are currently being studied, what has been studied and what should be studied in the future (what has not been covered). The research gap is the focus of study for this research which is on the influences on woodcarvings of traditional Malay houses in Negeri Sembilan.

Woodcarving researches that have been done previously are categorized into six topics which are studies on timber species, acoustic designs, and categories of woodcarvings, typologies of woodcarvings, woodcarving techniques and woodcarving patterns. The topics can be further elaborated into sub-topics according to each category as illustrated in figure 1.1 below:

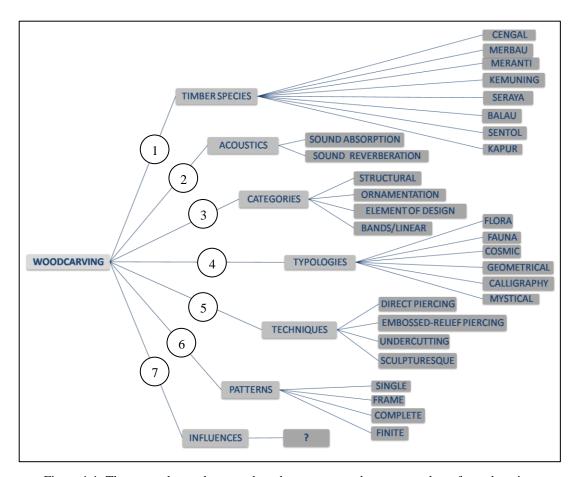


Figure 1.1: The research gap that were based on current and past researches of woodcarvings Source: Author

- i. For the first topic, commonly used timber species in woodcarvings were studied such as *cengal* (Balanocarpus Heimii), *sentol* (Sandoricum indicum) and *kapur* (Said & Abdullah, 2001).
- ii. The second topic studied was on timber acoustics in buildings which applied the usage of woodcarvings. The researches focused on the sound absorption of woodcarvings and also timber reverberations in buildings with woodcarvings.

- iii. The third topic focuses on categories of woodcarvings which studied the applications of woodcarvings in a timber house. The categories of woodcarvings are then divided into sub-topics which consist of woodcarvings as structural elements, ornamentations, elements of designs and bands/ liner elements (Ismail, 2002 & Thakkar, 2004).
- iv. The fourth topic that has been studied is on the typologies of woodcarvings which can be divided into flora, fauna, cosmic, geometrical, calligraphy and mystical. These typologies become the concept of designs for the woodcarvers and allowed them to carve elaborate designs.
- v. The fifth area studied is on woodcarving techniques which included direct piercing, emboss-relief piercing, sculpturesque and undercutting. The techniques used will determined the type and placement of woodcarving in the timber houses.
- vi. The sixth area of research is on woodcarving patterns such as single pattern, frame pattern, complete pattern and finite pattern. The patterns used are based on the types of woodcarvings in different parts of the Malay house.

The focus of study for this research is on the influence of woodcarvings. The influences will determine the origin of the woodcarving designs and indicate the placements of the woodcarvings used. The synthesis of all of the researches are placed into a diagram in figure 1.1 which illustrates the field of studies on woodcarvings around the world and the focus of study for this research.

1.5. Research Framework

Research framework is a tool that guides the researcher throughout the research period and act as a research structure. The structure for this research is divided into aim, objectives, methodologies and findings including data collections and conclusion. The structure further demonstrates the aim and objectives of this research which is to investigate influences on the designs of woodcarvings in the

traditional Negeri Sembilan Malay houses whereas the objectives are to identify the influences, to determine the placement and to find out the typologies of the woodcarvings. The methodologies taken in this research are then divided into four sections to explain the different data collections needed for this study. The research structure then shows the final steps of the research through data collection, analysis and synthesis and finally the conclusion of this study. The research structure which guides this thesis and the research undertaken is illustrated in figure 1.2.

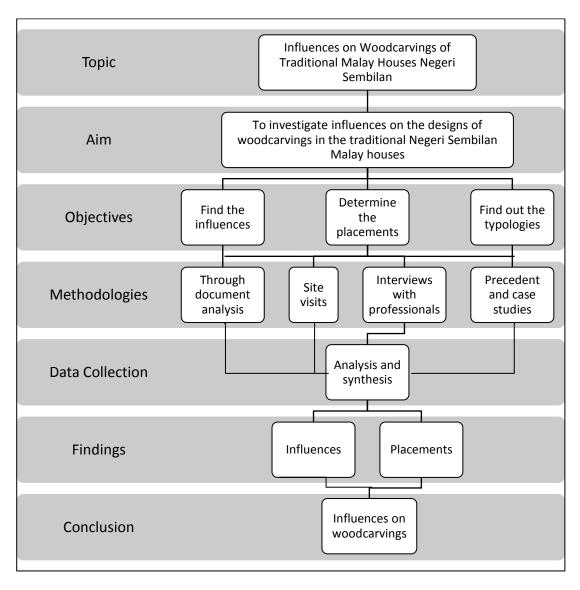


Figure 1.2: Research Framework used in this study Source: Author

1.6. Scope & Limitations

The scope of the study is only limited to Malay traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan of measured drawings in the collection of Center for the Study of the Built Environment in the Malay World (KALAM), UTM.

1.7. Significance

The significances of this research are as follows:

- The documentation of the design influences on woodcarvings of traditional Malay houses in Negeri Sembilan. This will help in identifying the local Negeri Sembilan woodcarving designs with similarities or differences from other states of Malaysia.
- ii. The research will help expand the current understanding on the evolution of Negeri Sembilan woodcarvings through the influences.
- iii. The research will continue the current researches done on woodcarvings and help determine the relations between the external influences and the changes that occurred in the local Negeri Sembilan woodcarving designs.

1.8. Expected Research Outcome

This research is expected to be a recorded and documented list of the different influences on woodcarvings of traditional Malay houses in Negeri

Sembilan. This will be done through the identification, analysis and synthesis of the data collected from woodcarvings of selected houses in Negeri Sembilan.

1.9. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 acts as the opening of the research by providing an overview of the research whereas chapter 2 plays the role of providing a background study on the topics being studied in this research. Chapter 3 explains the research methodologies taken in this thesis and the selected buildings being studied. Research methodologies are the systematic methods in which data are collected and it is also the chapter discussing on how the data are analyzed. All of the analysis and synthesis are compiled into chapter 4 in the data collection chapter whereas the findings are recorded in chapter 5. The analysis chapter in chapter 4 records and analyzes the woodcarvings collected from all of the selected buildings. Chapter 5 then records the findings from the woodcarvings which will determine the influences found. The final and concluding chapter is chapter 6 which has all of the final findings of this research and ultimately concludes the whole thesis.

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