



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE INTERDEPENDENCY OF HOUSE LAYOUT, PRIVACY AND
CULTURE FROM THE USER-BEHAVIOURAL PERSPECTIVE OF
URBAN MALAYS**

HARLINA MOHAMAD ALI

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE
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By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Science**

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To the memories of the quaint Malay house...

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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The most fundamental form of traditional architecture is housing, built by ordinary people to accommodate their lives daily needs. Previous studies have shown that these houses provided better congruence between human behaviour and culture. For instance, in traditional Malay house the spatial organization is more flexible as physical separation of space within it is minimal. Low priority is given to personal privacy where emphasis is more on maintaining closeness within the family or intimacy with family. The main priority is towards protecting the privacy of female family members from male guests. Therefore, the segregation of space between the public domain in front and the private domain at the back is very important. This is demonstrated in the *serambi* (reception area) located in front of the house where the male guests are entertained during social and religious functions.



Nowadays, majority of modern housing are mass-produced and inhabitants have little choice but to adapt their lifestyle within the 'given environment' regardless of their behavioural needs and cultural background. The spatial organization of modern link house is more formal as there are fixed and enclosed spaces for specific activities. Using scheduled-structured questionnaires, observation and graphic aid during interviews, this research analyzed the perspectives of urban Malays with regards to privacy concept and cultural needs. From the data analysis, many respondents agreed with the re-introduction of the *serambi* concept in modern housing as a transition zone for entertaining, where it is used to regulate privacy whilst maintaining privacy of family in the main house. It was found that even though intimacy with family is regarded important, there is awareness for personal privacy among the respondents due to the influence of modern housing layout especially about the separation of space for personal activities. The respondents cited that they either try to adapt themselves to the modern housing layout, adjusted the layout accordingly or have the intention to move elsewhere in the future. A spatial analysis of the respondents' house plans were conducted, which culminated with a proposed prototype of a standard link house layout which best fulfills current privacy and cultural needs of urban Malays.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**SALING PERGANTUNGAN DI ANTARA SUSUN ATUR RUMAH,
PRIVASI DAN BUDAYA DARI PANDANGAN PERILAKU PENGHUNI
MELAYU BANDAR**

Oleh

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Bentuk senibina tradisional paling asas adalah rumah kediaman yang dibina oleh orang kebanyakan untuk memenuhi kehendak kehidupan seharian mereka. Kajian lepas telah menunjukkan bahawa rumah kediaman sebegini memberi lebih keserasian di antara perilaku manusia dan budaya. Contohnya, di dalam rumah tradisional Melayu kegunaan ruangnya lebih fleksibel di mana pengasingan antara ruang secara fizikal adalah minimum. Privasi individu bukanlah suatu keutamaan di mana hubungan mesra antara ahli keluarga lebih ditekankan. Keutamaan adalah diberikan terhadap melindungi privasi ahli keluarga perempuan dari tetamu lelaki. Jadi, pengasingan di antara kawasan umum di hadapan dan kawasan persendirian di belakang rumah amat penting. Ini diperlihatkan melalui ruang serambi yang terletak di hadapan rumah, di mana para tetamu lelaki



dilayan semasa upacara keagamaan dan sosial. Kini, kebanyakan rumah kediaman moden dibina secara besar-besaran dan para penghuni tidak mempunyai banyak pilihan kecuali menyesuaikan cara hidup mereka dengan persekitaran yang diberikan. Susunan ruang di dalam rumah berangkai moden adalah lebih formal kerana terdapat ruang yang tetap dan tertutup untuk aktiviti tertentu. Menggunakan soalan berstruktur berjadual, pemerhatian dan bantuan grafik semasa sesi-sesi wawancara, kajian ini telah menganalisis pandangan penghuni Melayu bandar terhadap konsep privasi dan keperluan budaya Melayu. Dari analisis data, kebanyakan responden bersetuju dengan pengenalan semula konsep serambi di dalam perumahan moden sebagai zon perantaraan untuk melayani tetamu, dimana ia digunakan untuk mengatur tahap privasi sesebuah keluarga sekali gus meningkatkan privasi sekeluarga di dalam rumah utama. Juga didapati walaupun hubungan mesra antara ahli keluarga adalah penting, terdapat kesedaran untuk privasi individu di kalangan responden disebabkan pengaruh dari susun atur ruang perumahan moden tersebut, terutamanya mengenai pengasingan ruang untuk aktiviti peribadi. Para responden mengatakan mereka samada cuba menyesuaikan diri dengan susun atur rumah moden tersebut, membuat perubahan di dalam susunan ruang atau berhajat untuk berpindah ke rumah baharu di masa akan datang. Analisis ruang terhadap pelan-pelan rumah responden telah dijalankan yang berakhir dengan pengusulan

sebuah prototaip susunatur ruang rumah berangkai moden yang dianggap memenuhi kehendak semasa privasi dan budaya Melayu bandar.



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

HARLINA MOHAMAD ALI

Date: 1 JANUARY 2007



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LAM	Lembaga Arkitek Malaysia
NAPIC	National Property Information Centre
PAM	Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia
POE	Post-Occupancy Evaluation
SPA	Sales and Purchase Agreement
UBBL	Uniform Building By-Laws
UNESCO	United Nations Economic, Social & Community Organization



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Architecture involves not just the provision of shelter from the elements, but the creation of social and symbolic space – a space which both mirrors and moulds the world view of its creators and inhabitants.

Roxana Waterson, anthropologist (1997)

The above phrase eloquently described how built forms, particularly housing is the extension of one's personality. Personalization of the interior and exterior spaces reflects very much one's preference towards life. To a certain extent, the spaces subtly or dynamically reveal the inhabitants behavioural pattern, cultural background and religious inclination. Regardless of race, religion or status, most people take great pride in their homes and this can be observed in the acts of home improvement come festivities time. It is an important way in which people assert a sense of mastery and control over their environment and that is a significant factor in their well-being and self-esteem (Rapoport, 1976).



Rapoport (1976) further elaborated that the built environment can be seen in a number of different ways such as **spatial organization**, which is its most important and significant characteristic and the most useful for comparison at fundamental level. **Space** appears to be a more fundamental property of the built environment than form, materials, and the like. In this research, the spatial organization of the house represents the built environment. The spaces in the house can be seen as the setting for behaviours and behaviours are influenced by factors such as cultural values, religious allegiance, privacy needs, social customs and economic background.

To achieve congruence of built form and social form, it requires collaboration between designers and social scientists. One clear area, which such collaboration would be helpful is in defining certain concepts such as '**privacy**' (Rapoport, 1976). In his opinion, privacy and security are presumably involved in the creation of one's identity and in this, walls and doors have special use to limit and control.

A good housing development should not only take into account the physical aspects of design but also be sensitive to human needs (Lee et al., 2004). **Privacy** is a significant human need as it enables people to manage both personal activities and social interactions (Pedersen, 1997); and it

relates to effective individual and group functioning (Altman, 1975). Failure to meet privacy needs has shown to be related to antisocial behaviours and aggression (Glaser, 1964; Heffron, 1972). Privacy is one of the four main aspects of the **human spatial behaviour** concept or also known as **environmental psychology**. Proshansky (1990) provide a useful definition of the term environmental psychology:

“It is the discipline that is connected with the interactions and relationship between people and their environment.”

Appropriate housing setting sensitive to **culture** make more likely the survival of certain social units or networks, **behaviour**, activities and institutions, which is an indirect effects of environment on behaviour (Rapoport & Hardie, 1991). In fact, the main determinant of the physical arrangement of the house is the cultural matrix rather than non-cultural factors (Rapoport, 1969; Ozaki, 2002).

For instance, the spaces in the traditional Malay house support the daily and occasional activities of the people, providing convenience and consideration whilst translating the needs of **cultural aspects** (Ahmad Hariza & Zaiton, 2004). These include privacy from outsiders, separation of space during social interaction and position of women in the house. The open layout plan is an expression of the Malay traditional culture and

tradition, which promotes strong family bond, respect for the elderly and defined position of women in the house (Lim, 1987). The rooms in the traditional Malay house are limited in numbers where spaces are not defined by walls but by minor changes in levels. Thus, low priority is given to individual or **personal privacy** as compared to **intimacy with family** (Ahmad Hariza & Zaiton, 2004). However, the privacy of the female family members from the male guests is very significant and this can be observed in the distinctive zoning of spaces to provide level of privacy: a guest zone (public domain) with a clear male domain at the front, and the family zone (private domain), which is the female domain at the back (Ahmad Hariza, et al., 2006). Anuar (2006) concluded that the even though the traditional Malay house has only one bedroom (specifically for the unmarried female family members), symbolically the traditional Malay society observed their *adab* (manners) i.e. the way they behave and speak in the open strictly, even within the family environment. Their mannerism is reflected in the way they maneuver their everyday activities within the open plan of the traditional Malay house.

As in other Asian cultures like the Chinese (Yin, 2000) and Japanese (Ozaki, 2002), the Malays stressed on the importance of family togetherness and putting family matters first above one's own. Intimacy with family or being together with the family members in a private setting is given great